GHOST RIDER

Screenplay

by

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FADE IN:

TITLES OVER:

Stygian darkness. A prayer candle is lit revealing a hollow of bone-white walls. We PULL BACK from the dancing shadows and out through the EMPTY EYE SOCKET of a GRINNING SKULL.

WIDER - to reveal DECORATIVE SKELETONS crowding the cobble-stoned streets of this dusty border town. It's the annual *Los Dias de los Muertos* -- The Day of the Dead.

SUPER: SAN VENGANZA, TEXAS - 1866.

Makeshift altars draped in marigolds hold *Ofrenda de muertos* -- offerings for the dead. Tequila, cigars, and skull-shaped sweets called *calaveras* sit beside photos of lost loved ones.

A boy in a SKELETON MASK swipes a *calavera* from an altar as a young woman, ROSA, snatches him by the ear.

ROSA
Por los muertos, Miguel. Try that again and you'll be joining them.

Miguel grins and scurries off as Rosa laughs. But her smile falters as a filthy hand reaches INTO FRAME and snatches a cigarillo from Rosa's altar. We FOLLOW IT UP to the peeling, purple lips of an outlaw named MILTON.

ROSA (cont'd)
That's for my father...

Milton smirks at the photograph.

MILTON
He ain't gonna miss it.

He lights up the cigarillo as TWO MORE COWBOYS lope over to join him. They're both drunk and looking for trouble. The skinny one, VIRGIL, grabs a shot of whisky from Rosa's altar.

VIRGIL
Ya'll believe this? They lettin' good whisky go to waste.

Virgil downs the shot as the fat cowboy, WAGNER, grabs a fistful of corn cakes and stuffs them in his mouth.

WAGNER
(cheeks bulging)
Sum bitches sure can cook tho'!

Milton picks up the photograph of Rosa's father.

MILTON
Check it out, boys.

He holds up the burning ember of his cigarillo...

MILTON (cont'd)
Por los muertos.

...and burns a hole through her father's face.

ROSA
Bastard!

The Outlaws laugh cruelly. But then Milton stops as he notices a SHIMMERING LIGHT beaming through the hole in the photograph. Milton slowly lowers it to reveal --

A CRYSTAL SKULL

sitting at the top of Rosa's altar. The Outlaws stand transfixed; mesmerized by it's glassy, glacial gaze.

MILTON
It can't be...

Rosa lunges for the skull but Wagner snatches her by the arm. Milton gently picks up the crystal and holds it up to the candlelight to reveal -- an ETHEREAL MIST roiling within the chambers of its luminous death's head grin.

MILTON
The Soul Crystal...

We PUSH INTO the murky eyes of the skull as we go to...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Where an equally EERIE FOG swirls around ancient tombstones. Milton carries the skull in a leather satchel while Wagner and Virgil drag the struggling Rosa through the cemetery...

ROSA
I hope you burn in Hell!

VIRGIL
Been there. Done that.

ROSA
You've already stolen my father's memories! What else do you want?

Milton pulls the Soul Crystal from his satchel.

MILTON
I want you to tell me how it works.

ROSA
I already told you! I don't know what you're talking about!

Milton backhands Rosa across the cheek.

MILTON
Did that jog your memory, *chica*?

Rosa turns and spits in his face. A BEAT. And then a long, FORKED TONGUE flits out of his mouth to lick it off!

ROSA
(shuddering)
What *are* you...?

Milton smiles; his teeth rows of yellow needles. And as he speaks his voice flutters like the sound of insect wings:

MILTON
My name is legion. For we are many.

They close in around her with YELLOW EYES and feral smiles when, suddenly, a MONSTROUS HOWL splits the night!

MILTON (cont'd)
What in the hell...?

They turn to see a RIDER poised on top of the hill, cast in shadows except for the GLOWING EYES of his black steed.

VIRGIL
It's h-h-him. The Rider...

MILTON
It can't be! The Rider's dead!

WAGNER
Looks like he got better...

TCHINK! The Rider unhitches a BULLWHIP from his saddle...

VIRGIL
I-I-I ain't goin' back! Ya hear me, Milton? I ain't goin' back!

Milton stuffs the Soul Crystal back into his satchel.

MILTON
Then shut up and shoot!

They FIRE their pistols in a burst of MUZZLE FLASH! But as the smoke clears we reveal...SHAFTS OF MOONLIGHT...shining through the bullet holes in the Rider's chest!

WAGNER
Uh oh.

WHOOSH! The Rider combusts in a burst of preternatural flame! The flesh melts away from both Rider and horse, leaving only their flaming skeletons behind -- THE GHOST RIDER!

VIRGIL
Please...have mercy...?

A tendril of HELLFIRE sizzles up the length of his bullwhip. And in an otherworldly voice that echoes off the tombstones:

GHOST RIDER
NO MERCY.

The outlaws SHRIEK as the phantom rider charges down the hill! But as they run Milton trips over a tree root as --

THE SOUL CRYSTAL

rolls out of his leather satchel and down the hillside.

MILTON
NO!

The skull reaches the mouth of an OPEN GRAVE and totters on the edge before -- falling into the dark pit. The ground itself RUMBLES as fresh earth slides into the open grave; entombing the Soul Crystal within the hallowed ground.

THE GHOST RIDER

Barrels down upon the Outlaws. And with a HELLISH HOWL he cracks his BLAZING BULLWHIP and WIPES THE SCREEN TO BLACK!

BURN ON: **GHOST RIDER**

EXT. QUENTIN CARNIVAL - DAY

The quaint, old-fashioned traveling carnival has staked down in a dusty lot in the middle of this small Texas town. We PUSH THROUGH the sideshow attractions and games of chance to the BIG TOP where we hear the ROAR of a MOTORCYCLE ENGINE.

CARNIVAL BARKER
Ladies and gentlemen the Amazing...
Blazing...Stunt Cycle Spectacular!

INT. CARNIVAL TENT - DAY

Where an elaborate track has been constructed in the center of the stage. We CRANE UP to the top to reveal a handsome, 17-year-old boy straddling a motocross bike. JOHNNY BLAZE. He looks out to the crowd, searching for someone special...

ROXANNE SIMPSON. The most beautiful girl in the world (or at least Nolan County). Johnny gives her a wink before slapping down his face shield and taking off down the ramp.

JOHNNY'S POV - the track unravels before us like a child's Hot Wheels set come to life as--*VRRROOM!--a second* rider crosscuts our path. Meet BARTON BLAZE. Johnny's father.

WIDER - Father and son ride faster and faster around the criss-crossing track, missing each other by *inches* with each pass. They stop at opposite ends of the run and face off.

A DRUMROLL begins as the track is suddenly ignited in flames. They charge for the center in what appears to be a head-on collision. But at the last second the track <u>separates</u> into semi-circles, sending both riders into back somersaults!

The crowd CHEERS as father and son pull wheelies across the carnival big top. Johnny waves to Roxanne while riding the wheelie one-handed. But then he hits a loose patch of dirt. The audience GASPS before Johnny regains his balance and rides sheepishly after his father out of the big top.

BARTON (V.O.)
Johnathan Owen Blaze...

EXT. CARNIVAL TENT - NIGHT

Where Barton is giving his son an earful:

BARTON
If you're gonna play to the crowd at least wait until the stunt's over!

JOHNNY
(studying his boots)
Yes, sir...

BARTON
The moment you stop fearing these machines is a moment too late.

JOHNNY
Yes, sir...

BARTON
You're all I got left, son. If anything happened to you I'd cry a blue norther, ya'll want that?

JOHNNY
No, sir...

Barton coughs. An ugly, rattling sound.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
You're gettin' worse...

BARTON
After twenty years of two packs a day I'm gettin' what I deserve. That's what I'm tryin' to tell ya, son. The choices you make now will determine the rest of your life.

He puts his hand on Johnny's shoulder.

BARTON (cont'd)
It only takes a moment to turn... but a lifetime to turn back. You understand what I'm sayin'?

JOHNNY
I think so.

Barton smiles. Hates playing the hard ass.

BARTON
C'mere...

JOHNNY
Aw, Dad...

BARTON
Now.

Johnny steps over as Barton squeezes him in a rough bear hug.

JOHNNY
Dad! Stop it!

BARTON
Stop what? This?

He rubs his chin into Johnny's neck giving him a razor burn.

JOHNNY
I'm not a little kid anymore!

BARTON
Then stop riding like one!

JOHNNY
Okay! Okay! I promise!

They're both laughing and wrestling now. Until:

ROXANNE (O.S.)
Johnny?

They look to see Roxanne step into the tent. Johnny quickly pulls away from his father, trying to recover his cool.

JOHNNY
(smoothing his hair)
Hey. S'up, Roxanne?

ROXANNE
Hi, Mr. Blaze.

BARTON
(nodding)
Roxanne.

Johnny turns to his father with pleading eyes.

JOHNNY
Can I detail the bikes later?

Barton sighs. Young love. What are you gonna do?

BARTON
Go on. Get outta here.

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

It's a magical place for two teenagers in love. Twinkle lights dangle overhead, getting lost in the stars of the Texas sky. Johnny and Roxanne walk hand-in-hand when:

ROXANNE
Look!

A colorful show trailer with a neon sign out front reads: "CLARA THE CLAIRVOYANT SEES ALL."

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Clara's back.

JOHNNY
Yeah. She just got outta rehab.

ROXANNE
Come on!

JOHNNY
Are you serious?

ROXANNE
I wanna know our future.

JOHNNY
We live happily ever after.
Everybody knows that...

INT. CLARA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

CLARA MENNINGER, 60'S, wears a jet black wig and enough dark foundation to give her a faux gypsy complexion. She slumps back in an easy chair while sipping brandy from a silver flask. She's startled by the KNOCK at her door.

ROXANNE (O.S.)
Clara?

CLARA
Hmm? Uh, one moment! Clara is...
conversing with the spirit world...

Clara takes another slug from her "spirit world" before hiding the flask under her chair. She taps a foot pedal that illuminates her crystal ball with a ghostly purple light.

CLARA (cont'd)
Enter ye and know all...

They step inside to see her 'deep in concentration.'

ROXANNE
Hey, Clara.

Clara peeks to see it's only Johnny and Roxanne.

CLARA
Oh, hiya kids. What's new?

She takes her foot off the pedal as the crystal ball dies.

JOHNNY
Shouldn't you already 'know' that?

CLARA
Nobody likes a smart ass, kid...

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

A silver Cadillac pulls up to the back entrance of the carnival as QUENTIN SIMPSON steps out. He's the tightly wound owner of the carnival. And Roxanne's father.

QUENTIN
Where's Roxanne?

WIDER - to reveal a FAMILY OF CONTORTIONISTS warming up on a mat below, their bodies coiled around each other like flesh-covered pipe cleaners. The MOTHER lifts her leg up from behind her neck and points her toe towards Clara's trailer.

CLARA (V.O.)
Being loved gives one strength...

INT. CLARA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

As Johnny reluctantly lets Clara read his fortune...

CLARA
But loving someone back gives one courage. And courage is what...

She stops. Shakes it off.

CLARA (cont'd)
...what you will need...

Clara suddenly GASPS as a look of sheer terror creeps over her face; her chest hitching as she tries to find her breath!

JOHNNY
Clara!

And then it's gone. Just as quickly as it came.

ROXANNE
Clara, what is it?

But before they can press further:

QUENTIN (O.S.)
ROXANNE?

ROXANNE
My father...

JOHNNY
The Tunnel of Love?

ROXANNE
Five minutes...

They kiss. Clara scowls, shooing Roxanne away.

CLARA
No time for that! Now go!

Roxanne slips out through the back of the trailer <u>just</u> as Quentin comes barging in through the front.

CLARA (cont'd)
Mr. Simpson! What a pleasant--

QUENTIN
Cut the crap, Clara.
(to Johnny)
Where's my daughter?

JOHNNY
What are you askin' me for?
She's the psychic.

Quentin clenches his jaw. He hates this kid.

QUENTIN
I've told you before, Blaze. Stay away from Roxanne. The last thing she needs is to get mixed up with some carny trash like you.

JOHNNY
I'm the son of Barton Blaze.

QUENTIN
Exactly.

Johnny starts for him but Clara takes his arm. Quentin smirks and walks out the door as Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY
Why does he hate me so much?

CLARA
You've got something he wants...
Roxanne's unconditional love.

Johnny steps for the door before turning back.

JOHNNY
Clara? What did you see?

Clara forces a smile as she shrugs it off.

CLARA
Same thing I always see. Nothing.
Go on now. Roxanne's waiting.

Johnny exits as we CLOSE ON Clara's troubled reaction...

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

Young lovers ride swan boats through the gaping jaws of a LAUGHING DEVIL and into the mysterious Tunnel of Love.

JOHNNY (V.O.)
He's wrong about me...

INT. TUNNEL OF LOVE - NIGHT

Johnny and Roxanne sit on a plank up in the rafters, watching the boats drift beneath their feet along the faux River Styx.

ROXANNE
Of course he is.

JOHNNY
I'm gonna be somebody some day...

ROXANNE
(touching his cheek)
You already *are*.

Johnny smiles. But then Roxanne looks away.

JOHNNY
Roxy? What is it?

ROXANNE
He's sending me away.

JOHNNY
What? Where?

ROXANNE
To my Aunt's in New York. I heard him on the telephone last night. What are we going to do? He'll try anything to keep us apart...

Johnny looks off. Defiant.

JOHNNY
We'll run away together. We'll go somewhere he'll never find us...

ROXANNE
You really mean it?

JOHNNY
Meet me tomorrow after the show,
at the oak tree on Crowley Hill.
Pack only what you need.

She kisses him. Her eyes full of the future.

ROXANNE
I love you, Johnny Blaze...

EXT. TUNNEL OF LOVE - NIGHT

As LIGHTNING STRIKES over the face of the Laughing Devil:

ROXANNE (V.O.)
Always and forever.

INT. BLAZE TRAILER - NIGHT

The small trailer is filled with old racing trophies and posters proclaiming "THE AMAZING BLAZE" and "LEAP OF DEATH!" Johnny hurries inside to tell his father his plans.

JOHNNY
Dad? I need to talk to ya...

Nothing. But then we hear a WHEEZING as CAMERA CIRCLES to reveal Barton slumped over in his chair. He's deathly pale.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
(rushing over)
We gotta get you to a doctor...

Barton gives him a telling look.

BARTON
I've already *been* to the doctor.
So much for 'death defying,' huh?

Barton shrugs it off. Hates feeling sorry for himself.

BARTON (cont'd)
What'd you wanna tell me, son?

A BEAT. And then Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY
Nothin'. C'mon. Let's get you to bed.

INT. MAINTENANCE TENT - NIGHT

Where Johnny is tuning up the bikes. In the corner is his father's pride and joy: a late 70's Harley-Davidson Chopper. The name "GRACE" has been airbrushed across the gas tank.

ON JOHNNY

As his wrench slips and cuts his hand. He CURSES and KICKS the chopper over in a sudden burst of anger and frustration:

JOHNNY
IT'S NOT FAIR!

He slumps to the ground as the tears come at last.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Please...don't take my dad...I'd give anything to make him better...

EXT. CARNIVAL GROUNDS - NIGHT

A THUNDERBOLT illuminates the Texas sky as carny workers hurry to strike their tents before the storm hits. But strolling purposely through it all we single out...

THE STRANGER.

Bald, tall, and deathly pale, he wears a long black coat that flaps behind him like a magician's cape. He walks with a limp and wields a cane with a SILVER SKULL on its handle.

The Stranger turns to see CLARA watching through her trailer window. She GASPS and snaps her blinds shut as he smiles.

ESTABLISHING

To reveal the carnival lights of the speedway blinking off around him as he goes, creating a literal PATH OF DARKNESS in his wake. Something Wicked This Way Comes.

JOHNNY (V.O.)
Anything...

INT. MAINTENANCE TENT - NIGHT

As Johnny wipes his tears. But then he stops as he sees his breath appearing in ICY BURSTS. The room has gone cold.

THE STRANGER (O.S.)
God's not here, Johnny...

Johnny turns to see The Stranger standing in the doorway. His eyes shimmer in the darkness. A cat's eyes.

THE STRANGER (cont'd)
But I am.

JOHNNY
Are...are you a doctor?

THE STRANGER
I'm whatever you want me to be.
But first, you must invite me in.

JOHNNY
(finally)
Come in...

The Stranger bows and steps inside as the LIGHTS DIM in his presence. Watch closely and you may catch a glimpse of his TRUE FORM in the MONSTROUS SHADOWS on the wall...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
My father...he has cancer...

The Stranger slowly circles Johnny. Like a shark.

THE STRANGER
Yesss...

JOHNNY
Can you help him?

THE STRANGER
Yesss...
(a little smile)
...for a price.

Lightning CRACKLES to reveal that the silver skull seems to be changing. Its smile has grown wider. It's teeth longer.

JOHNNY
I-I don't have any money.

THE STRANGER
No Money? Now that *is* a problem.

JOHNNY
Please...there's gotta be something
else you want...the trailer...the
motorcycles...just name it...

The Stranger traces a long finger over the old chopper...past the word "GRACE" on the tank...and up onto the handlebars...

THE STRANGER
What I want...

...before running up Johnny's arm and stopping on his heart.

THE STRANGER (cont'd)
Is right here.

Johnny steps back from his icy touch.

JOHNNY
I-I don't understand...

THE STRANGER
Your soul, Johnny Blaze.

Johnny tries to laugh. But he can't find his voice.

JOHNNY
(finally)
I don't believe in souls...

As The Stranger looms:

THE STRANGER
Then you've got nothing to lose.

The SILVER SKULL seems to be laughing now as we hear:

BARTON (V.O.)
Johnny? Hey, Johnny Boy!

INT. JOHNNY'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Johnny opens his eyes to see his father smiling down at him, backlit by the morning sun. And he looks terrific.

BARTON
Wake up, sleeping beauty!
We got a show to do!

JOHNNY
Dad..?
(realizing)
DAD!

Johnny grabs him as Barton laughs.

BARTON
I beat it, son. I can feel it.
Some how. Some way. I beat it.

We PULL BACK from father and son as we hear:

CARNIVAL BARKER (V.O.)
Ladies and gentlemen the Amazing...
Blazing...Stunt Cycle Spectacular!

INT. CARNIVAL TENT - DAY

The Carnival Barker sets a torch to the track. The crowd CHEERS as the flames race along the orange loop-de-loop.

CLOSE ON - THE SILVER SKULL -- The Stranger's long, bony fingers TAP-TAP-TAP over the grinning head of his cane as...

Johnny's engine dies. But Barton is at full speed, and as he hits the flaming loop-de-loop we see the FUEL LINE along the track *snap free*. FUEL SPRAYS across the flames as --

KABOOM! The track EXPLODES into an orange fireball! The CROWD SCREAMS as CAMERA RUSHES to Johnny's horrified eyes.

JOHNNY
DAAAAD!

Johnny runs to his side and pries his helmet off. It's bad.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Y-You're gonna be okay, Dad...

BARTON
No...I'm not...but at least I
went out with my leathers on...

Barton grimaces as Johnny takes his hand. Squeezes.

BARTON (cont'd)
You're on your own now, kid...

JOHNNY
But I need you, Dad...

BARTON
No you don't...I did that much right...

Barton smiles. So proud of his son.

BARTON (cont'd)
I used to dream about being a
champion...about leaving my mark
on the world...but now I know...
(fading away)
You are my mark on the world.

And with that, Barton Blaze slips away forever.

JOHNNY
(as the tears fall)
I'll cry you a blue norther...

EXT. CROWLEY HILL - DAY

Roxanne stands beneath an ancient oak, sheltered from the storm as STONE ANGELS watch over her from the graveyard. She smiles at what Johnny's carved into the tree trunk:

Always & Forever

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Johnny rides his father's old Harley-Davidson for Crowley Hill. But as he goes the STORM INTENSIFIES around him -- *as if preventing him from his future with Roxanne.*

A LIGHTNING BOLT

strikes the road before him! Johnny lays the bike down, SCRAPING SPARKS along the blacktop before finally bringing the motorcycle to a steaming, metallic stop.

WIDER - to reveal Johnny has stopped at a CROSSROADS. He struggles to his feet to see that, amazingly, he's <u>unharmed</u>.

THE STRANGER (O.S.)
Where do you think you're going?

Johnny whirls around to find The Stranger before him.

JOHNNY
You lied to me! You said that you'd save my father's life!

THE STRANGER
I said that I'd remove his cancer. And I did. I kept my word. And now it's time that you kept yours.

JOHNNY
No...

THE STRANGER
You belong to <u>me</u> now...
(tapping Johnny's heart)
'Always and Forever.'

Johnny freezes as he realizes:

JOHNNY
You leave her out of this...

THE STRANGER
I will. If you will.

JOHNNY
No. I won't. I can't...

THE STRANGER
Don't tempt me, Johnny. A pure soul like Roxanne's only comes around once in a millennium...

JOHNNY
You son of a bitch!

Johnny CHARGES HIM as The Stranger raises his cane:

THE STRANGER
ENOUGH!

The Stranger ERUPTS WITH FURY as we see glimpses of his demonic TRUE SELF within a roiling BURST OF HELLFIRE!

THE STRANGER
DO NOT THREATEN *ME*, JOHNNY BLAZE!

Johnny is blasted back, trembling before him.

THE STRANGER
Be wary. Be vigilant. For one day I will return to claim what's <u>mine</u>!

He holds up the SILVER SKULL as a FIERY WRAITH *streams out of its eyes and into the eyes of Johnny Blaze!* He SCREAMS as TENDRILS OF BLUE HELLFIRE course over his shuddering body and into the motorcycle engine itself!

And as the smoke clears Johnny opens his eyes to see -- the Stranger is <u>gone</u>. Johnny looks to the road ahead. Knowing now that it's a road he must travel alone.

JOHNNY
Roxanne...

EXT. CROWLEY HILL - SAME

Where Roxanne stands shivering under the old oak tree. We SLOWLY PULL BACK -- leaving her waiting up on the hill...

EXT. CROSSROADS - SAME

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

His tears washing away in the rain as he rides away from home. Away from Roxanne. Always and Forever.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE ALAMODOME - DAY

CLOSE UP - EYES

Haunted. Empty. We PULL BACK to reveal that we're looking through the FACE SHIELD of a MOTORCYCLE HELMET. And in its reflection is a SEA OF SPECTATORS rising to their feet.

CROWD
BLAZE! BLAZE! BLAZE!

WIDER - to reveal JOHNNY BLAZE, now in his 30's. He has the rugged good looks of a modern-day cowboy. He wears a dark blue jumpsuit form-fitted to his lean, muscular physique.

SUPER: PRESENT DAY.

Johnny steels himself for what's to come as --

WHOOSH!

CAMERA PULLS BACK over 40 AUTOMOBILES to a landing ramp on the other side. Johnny PUMPS HIS FIST as they BURST INTO FLAMES!

BACK IN BLACK (remix) rocks the P.A. as 30,000 strong ROAR their approval. Welcome to the world of X-treme Motorcycle Jumping -- The Gladiator Games of rock and roll.

Johnny cracks the throttle as the motorcycle takes off. He taps the NOS button just before hitting the take-off ramp --

And we're flying!

Johnny sails in SLOW-MOTION across the stadium, backlit by an explosion of flashbulbs. But as he gradually makes his descent we realize -- that he's not going to make it.

CHA-CHUNK!

The motorcycle BOUNCES off the hood of the last car before DUMPING Johnny on his head like a rag doll! He tumbles over burning asphalt before getting SLAMMED into the retaining wall! The CROWD SCREAMS as the Stunt Team runs to his side.

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

As Johnny's Chief Mechanic (and best friend) RANDALL 'MACK' MACKENZIE pries Johnny's helmet off and pats his cheeks...

MACK
C'mon, J.B. Talk to me...

And then, like magic, Johnny's eyes roll forward. He blinks.

JOHNNY
Is the bike okay?

Mack grins.

MACK
He's fine.

The CROWD CHEERS as the stunt team helps him to his feet. Johnny waves to the fans, grimacing through bruised ribs.

T.V. REPORTER (V.O.)
Johnny, you gave us quite a scare out there today.

JOHNNY (V.O.)
Well, that's what I'm good at...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

MUSIC UP: LA GRANGE BY ZZ TOP

The Team Blaze tour bus drives through a heavy rain for home as it passes a Texas-shaped road sign along the highway:

"DRIVE FRIENDLY - THE TEXAS WAY!"

INT. TEAM BLAZE TOUR BUS - NIGHT

The team plays poker in the back, laughing over cigarettes and long necks. Mack balances a beer on his belly while playing the PlayStation 2 game: "JOHNNY BLAZE - AIRTIME."

VIDEO GAME
(crashing noises)
"And Blaze is down!"

Mack giggles. CAMERA CONTINUES before STOPPING on Johnny, watching an ESPN2 interview from earlier tonight.

T.V. REPORTER
Sports Illustrated has named you "The Father of the X-Games.' How does that make you feel?

JOHNNY
Old.

It's clear that Johnny is *not* a great interview...

T.V. REPORTER
(milking it)
Johnny, you've been at the top of the daredevil game for many years now. You've dominated the record books and made your fortune many times over. And yet, you continue to risk life and limb. To ride your motorcycle into the face of death and *spit* in its eye. *Why?*

A LONG BEAT. Johnny shrugs.

JOHNNY
Habit.

VIDEO GAME
(crashing noises)
"And Blaze is down!"

Johnny clicks off his T.V. and shoots Mack a look.

MACK
What?

JOHNNY
Have you tried *not* crashing?

MACK
Level six is a bitch. Here...

Mack tosses him the controller. Johnny starts playing his own video game. He's <u>terrible</u>. He CRASHES his virtual self.

JOHNNY
This game's impossible...

Mack routs through the ice box before reappearing with a six-pack of Lone Star Beer and a leathery strip of DRIED MEAT.

MACK
Check it out. A seven-course dinner. You want some jerky?

Mack takes a bite out of the meat.

JOHNNY
That ain't jerky...

Mack stops. Then he shrugs and takes another bite.

VIDEO GAME
(crashing noises)
"And Blaze is down!"

MACK
Just like the real thing...

JOHNNY
What's that supposed to mean?

MACK
You should be takin' a dirt nap after that rag doll today.

JOHNNY
I got lucky...

MACK
'Lucky?' My hunting dog's named 'Lucky' and he's got one eye and no nuts. Lucky don't cover it, J.B. You got an <u>angel</u> watching over you.

JOHNNY
Yeah. Maybe...

Johnny tosses the controller back to Mack before looking out the window to the passing desert; his rain-distorted reflection superimposed over the coming storm...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Or maybe it's something else.

EXT. DESERT - SAME

We PUSH THROUGH the desert mesa to find the structures of a forgotten GHOST TOWN. If it looks familiar, it's because it's the ruins of San Venganza from our opening prologue.

CAW! CAW! CAW!

A MURDER OF CROWS sit atop a tree in the middle of the square. In the Old West this was known as a Hanging Tree.

CAW! CAW! CAW!

Their calling grows louder and louder until -- *THUMP*. One of the crows hits the ground dead. *THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.* More crows hit the ground. Like canaries in a coal mine...

A TEXAS RED WOLF runs out of its den, jittery and confused. It leaps in circles YAPPING at the RUMBLING STORM overhead...

A RATTLESNAKE slithers from its hole and swallows its tail. Its skin burns and flakes like fish scales in a smoke house...

The Red Wolf HOWLS as it stumbles to the ground. Its tongue swells and bloats as it DECAYS before our eyes...

THUNDER BOOMS as HAIL rains down like bullets. And as it hits the ground it BURSTS INTO FLAMES; like a Bosch painting come to life. The storm ends as quickly as it began. And then...

A SHADOW

creeps over the desert. We hear a WHISPERING in the wind... the CHATTERING of some ancient tongue. The Shadow stops as the CAMERA CIRCLES to reveal a YOUNG MAN in the moonlight.

He's not much more than a boy but he carries himself with the brazen temerity of a born leader. He wears a feral smile on his handsome face and a long black coat that folds behind him like a raven's wings. Death has come to Texas.

And its name is <u>BLACKHEART</u>.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS - NIGHT

Glass and steel monoliths throw shadows over the forgotten sections of downtown. We CLOSE ON the funky neighborhood of Deep Ellum as the tour bus pulls up to an old warehouse.

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

The line between home and garage has been erased here. Motorcycles and spare parts are everywhere. Johnny steps out of the old service elevator and drops his duffel bag as Mack rolls the smashed stunt cycle into the living room.

MACK
Ya'll got plans tonight?

JOHNNY
I'm gonna mess around with Grace.

Mack glances over to see 'Grace" in the corner -- the old Chopper is nearly swimming in a puddle of leaking oil.

MACK
Ever think about getting a new girl? One that doesn't need a kick start?

Johnny shrugs it off.

JOHNNY
Relationships are messy...

MACK
'Messy?' That old panhead leaks more oil than the Exxon Valdez.

JOHNNY
She's not leaking oil. She's marking her territory...

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Mack parks the motorcycle along the wall as we PAN OVER to reveal SIX MORE MOTORCYCLES, all smashed to hell and back.

MACK
(shakes his head)
'Lucky...'

Our CAMERA LOWERS to profile these gleaming machines as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

A DOZEN HARLEY-DAVIDSONS

lined up together like chrome horses to a hitching post. We hear RAUCOUS LAUGHTER as we PULL BACK to reveal we're...

EXT. BROKEN SPOKE SALOON - NIGHT

A dusty biker bar in the middle of the desert. A gang of tattooed HELL'S ANGELS stand outside drinking. Real hard-core felons. One of the bigger Angels looks over to see:

HELL'S ANGEL
What the Hell...?

BLACKHEART

stepping out of the moonlit mesa towards the garish glow of the biker bar. He steps up to the entrance when the big Hell's Angel stops him with a rough hand to the chest.

HELL'S ANGEL
Angel's only.

Blackheart stops. Puzzled. This world is all new to him. And it's going to be one Hell of a learning curve...

BLACKHEART
You...are an angel?

HELL'S ANGEL
We're *all* Angels here.

The biker gang closes in around them as the Hell's Angel JABS HIS FINGER into Blackheart's chest.

HELL'S ANGEL
You got a problem with that?

We CLOSE ON Blackheart as a sinister smile splits his face.

BLACKHEART
As a matter of fact...

Blackheart jabs <u>his</u> finger back into the Hell's Angel -- *and it sinks right through his chest*! The biker SHRIEKS as poisonous NECROPLASM seeps into his heart, turning his eyes and skin an eerie MIDNIGHT BLUE as he decomposes from the inside out!

BLACKHEART
...I do.

INT. BROKEN SPOKE SALOON - A MOMENT LATER

The 'Fallen Angels' are everywhere. And like the biker outside their poisoned corpses are a shimmering dark blue color. Not a soul has been spared. Or so it would seem.

BLACKHEART
I know you're here. I could smell the brimstone from a mile away.

Blackheart steps past the MUMMIFIED BARTENDER -- frozen in place while drawing a draft beer.

BLACKHEART
You've been hiding for so long that you've forgotten what you are...

The beer is running into the overflowing mug and onto the sawdust-covered floor...creating a rivulet of foam...

BLACKHEART
Living like a scavenger off the scraps the humans cast aside... like carrion waiting to feed...

We hear a low SLURPING SOUND as Blackheart follows the meandering trail of beer past the billiard tables...

BLACKHEART
But that's all about to change...

...where it stops at a PILE OF SAWDUST in the corner.

BLACKHEART
The time for hiding is over.

Blackheart KICKS at the sawdust. A SUDDEN SHRIEK erupts as a MONSTROUS DUST DEVIL bursts forth from the ground! We see a feral FLASH of TEETH and TALONS within this whirling dervish before the strange creature recedes back into the shadows.

BLACKHEART
Hello, Gressil.

They are called THE HIDDEN -- Elemental Demons that can hide in anything. Anywhere. *You never know where they might be.*

BLACKHEART
Welcome to the New Hell.

Two curious YELLOW EYES peer out from the darkness...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Johnny leans against his motorcycle, gazing at the headstone of BARTON BLAZE as a stone angel watches over him. We hear the deep booming of a THUNDERCLAP in the distance as...

VOICE
Looks like a blue norther...

Johnny turns to find a powerful-looking OLD MAN standing before him. He wears work gloves, a battered fedora, and holds a blunt shovel in his hands. Meet CARETAKER. At 60 years old he's tougher than most men half his age.

JOHNNY
That's what my Dad used to call it.

Caretaker nods. Spits a stream of tobacco juice.

CARETAKER
Folks call me Caretaker.

JOHNNY
Johnny...

Lightning strikes as THUNDER BOOMS again. Closer now.

CARETAKER
Some folks believe that thunder is the Devil's stomach growling.

Caretaker sizes him up for a BEAT.

CARETAKER
What do *you* believe?

Weird. Johnny shrugs it off and fishes for a cigarette.

JOHNNY
I believe I'd better get a move on before the storm hits...

Johnny flicks his Zippo lighter as Caretaker nods.

CARETAKER
Looks like it's already here.

Johnny stops as he sees -- *the flame is bending towards him.* He SNAPS the lighter shut. What the Hell? He looks over to see the old man walking back into the cemetery.

JOHNNY
Hey...hey wait a minute!

ESTABLISHING

As Johnny steps over the hill to see -- Caretaker is gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

An oily BLACK RAT waddles through a filthy puddle. The rat stops and SQUEALS as it suddenly decomposes before our eyes. A BEAT. And then our SHADOW OF DEATH rises over the alley.

BLACKHEART
It's like the Tower of Babel on the brink of collapse. Where everything has a price but nothing has value...

We're in the RED-LIGHT DISTRICT of Downtown Dallas; one of the hardened arteries that leads to this city's dead heart. CAMERA CIRCLES to reveal Blackheart, seemingly all alone...

BLACKHEART
They don't deserve their souls.

But then CAMERA CIRCLES again to reveal GRESSIL is now at his side. He wears a long black coat and has taken on a youthful appearance similar to Blackheart's own. They both stop as --

A SHADOW

passes over them, accompanied by the FLAPPING OF WINGS.

BLACKHEART
Show yourself, brother...

Suddenly, a *rush of hot air* blows past them as the sinister shadow drops down into the alley. Its oily wings cloak its head like a giant bat before it reemerges in human form...

SKINNER.

He has a shaved head save for the tight white Mohawk that runs down the back of his neck. As his SKIN RIPPLES his Mohawk FOSSILIZES into rows of RAZOR-SHARP BONE. He tenses his forearms as BONY PROTRUSIONS appear from underneath his skin. These talon-like weapons can cut through anything. Like the others he cloaks himself in a long, black duster.

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
Welcome to the land of the living.

EXT. BODY PIERCING SHOP - NIGHT

Where a YOUNG PUNK steps out holding his swollen mouth...

PIERCING SHOP OWNER
Keep it clean and that swelling should go down in a few days...

YOUNG PUNK
Othay. Thee oo ater.

A BURST OF LIGHTNING rips the sky as rain begins to fall. The Punk curses as he bunches up his coat and starts for home. A BEAT. And then CAMERA TILTS DOWN to reveal...

THE RAINDROPS

are trickling *towards each other* across the wet street... pooling together to form one shimmering LIQUID MASS...

INT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

The Punk takes a short-cut through the alley but stops when his Doc Marten's step into a DEEP PUDDLE of rain water.

YOUNG PUNK (cont'd)
Aw, thit.

He shakes the water from his boots as we WIDEN to reveal -- THE WATER -- rising up from the puddle behind him! The Punk slowly turns around as we reveal the translucent visage of --

WALLOW

emerging from out of the water wall! The Punk starts to scream as a BURST OF WATER suddenly WIPES THE SCREEN to --

A TONGUE STUD

clattering to the street below. And then a CLEAR HAND reaches INTO FRAME and picks up the punk's black coat...

BLACKHEART
Wallow...

WIDER - to reveal Blackheart, Skinner, and Gressil standing before him. Like the others, Wallow now appears young, pale, and heroin-chic thin. A neo-goth rendition of The Lost Boys.

BLACKHEART
Welcome to the Family...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TEXAS STADIUM - NEXT DAY

A banner reads: "JOHNNY BLAZE - TOUCHDOWN JUMP!" But someone has crossed out "TOUCHDOWN" and replaced it with "SUICIDE."

INT. TEXAS STADIUM - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Johnny splashes cold water over his face and stares at his reflection before a smiling PUBLICIST pops his head inside.

JOHNNY
No more interviews...

PUBLICIST
This is the last one. They came all the way from New York City.

JOHNNY
I suck at interviews.

PUBLICIST
That's not true...

Johnny just gives him a look.

PUBLICIST
Okay, its true. Just try to remember to smile...relax...and mention Pennzoil.

INT. TEXAS STADIUM - HALLWAY - DAY

As Johnny walks down the hall we see a YOUNG WOMAN waiting at the other end, silhouetted by the stadium lights like a seraphim. Our world slows to a standstill as we see the ghostly haze of the fluorescents fading away to reveal:

ROXANNE
Hello, Johnny.

The sweetest sucker punch of all time...

JOHNNY
Roxanne...?

She smiles beatifically. And if it takes *our* breath away (and it does) you can only imagine how Johnny is feeling...

ROXANNE
Are you ready for me?

JOHNNY
(breathless)
Oh God yes...

ROXANNE
(suddenly)
Medium on me, Stu...

ESTABLISHING

as we reveal a full CAMERA CREW around them. The camera man, STUART, frames them up as Roxanne checks her microphone.

STUART
We're good to go, Roxy...

ROXANNE
And 3..2...
(smiling into camera)
We're here with daredevil Johnny Blaze just moments before his world-record jump over Texas Stadium. Johnny, how are you feeling today?

Johnny just stares. A deer in the headlights.

JOHNNY
Pennzoil...

The Publicist rubs his tired eyes.

ROXANNE
After months of preparation you're about to attempt a death-defying, field goal-to-field goal jump. What's going through your mind?

JOHNNY
God you're beautiful...
(freezing)
I said that out loud, didn't I?

The Publicist buries his face in his hands.

ROXANNE
We'll edit that out later.

STUART
Gee, ya think?

ROXANNE
Your critics say that you have a death wish. That these stunts of yours are nothing more than a form of pay-per-view suicide.

JOHNNY
They say that...?

ROXANNE
They also say that you're a poor role model for the young people of today. How do you respond to that?

JOHNNY
They're probably right...

The Publicist looks up to the heavens. 'Why me?'

ROXANNE
(lowering her voice)
This is the part where you're supposed to say you're a highly trained professional...

JOHNNY
Right...I'm...a highly trained professional...and what I do is extremely...extremely...

He drifts off. Getting lost in her eyes.

ROXANNE
'Dangerous?'

JOHNNY
Extremely.
(beat)
So don't try this at home...

ROXANNE
Good luck today, Johnny Blaze.

JOHNNY
Thanks...Roxanne...Simpson.

ROXANNE
Back to you in the studio.

STUART
Aaaaand...we're out.

Stuart turns to the Publicist.

STUART
Doesn't he use a helmet?

NEW ANGLE

As the hallway clears out, leaving Johnny and Roxanne alone.

JOHNNY
I...I didn't know that you...I mean...

ROXANNE
I know. Imagine how I felt when they handed me the assignment.

JOHNNY
You're a reporter now?

ROXANNE
I'm on my way. I cover human interest pieces for a morning show back in New York. It's not exactly the hard news beat that I always dreamed about but it pays the bills.

JOHNNY
So how long are you in town?

ROXANNE
I'm flying back tomorrow.

Johnny takes a deep breath before:

JOHNNY
Roxanne...

But then he stops as he notices:

JOHNNY
You're married...

She holds up a brilliant pear-shaped diamond ring.

JOHNNY
That's...that's great...I'm...
really happy for you...

ROXANNE
Are you?

A LONG BEAT as they get lost in each other's eyes.

JOHNNY
(deep breath)
Roxanne...

MACK (O.S.)
Let's haul ass, J.B.!

They look to see Mack popping his head into the hallway.

MACK (cont'd)
This crowd looks like what happens
when white meets trash! We don't
want 'em gettin' any drunker!

He slips back out into the lights of the stadium.

ROXANNE
You'd better go...

JOHNNY
Will you stay for the jump?

ROXANNE
(shaking her head)
I never liked watching you jump.
It always put my stomach in knots.

JOHNNY
I never knew that.

ROXANNE
You never asked.

Johnny nods. An awkward moment.

JOHNNY
It was good to see you.

ROXANNE
You too.

And as they embrace we see Johnny close his eyes and breathe her in; taking a sensory snapshot before reluctantly letting her go. She walks off before:

JOHNNY
Roxanne...?

She turns back. A LONG BEAT. There's so much he wants to say. But in the end...what *can* he say? He gives a sad smile. She nods back. And then she walks out the door...leaving Johnny looking small and alone...

INT. TEXAS STADIUM - DAY

It's an awesome sight. An insanely vertical SKI RAMP runs from the top of the stadium and down through the goal post, with the landing ramp in the *other* end zone 100 yards away.

Johnny PUMPS HIS FISTS -- *his signature move* -- as the full length of the gridiron EXPLODES into a GIANT BONFIRE!

HIGHWAY TO HELL (remix) rocks the stadium as the CROWD CHEERS. But as we CLOSE ON Johnny we see his head is somewhere else.

MACK
Remember to hit your NOS while on the *approach,* not at take-off--

JOHNNY
(suddenly)
Am I crazy?

MACK
You're jumping Texas Stadium. I think it's implied.

JOHNNY
I love her, Mack. I always have.

ESTABLISHING - as the crowd grows restless...

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Blaze and Chief Mechanic Randall Mackenzie run one final check...

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
(milking it)
You can feel the tension all the way up here in the booth. These men know that the smallest error can cost Johnny Blaze his life.

ON JOHNNY & MACK

debating Johnny's love life before 50,000 fans...

MACK
So what if she's married? You can still tell her how you feel, right?

JOHNNY
It's complicated...

MACK
It's 'complicated.' It's 'messy.' Ya know, for a daredevil you're some kinda chickenshit when it comes to your own heart.

Johnny starts to argue. But he can't.

MACK
You've been ridin' the gravy train on biscuit wheels, brother. But it's all hat and no cattle unless ya got someone to share it with.

JOHNNY
(realizing)
You're right...

MACK
Don't tell me. Tell her.

JOHNNY
But how? She's probably all the way to the interstate by now.

MACK
I pumped this sled full of enough Nitrous to shame the space shuttle.
(grinning)
Improvise.

Johnny smiles before slapping down his face shield.

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
And here goes Blaze!

Johnny ROCKETS down the ski ramp and LIFTS OFF through the uprights as Mack closes his eyes like a frightened child.

MACK
He's not gonna make it...

Mack peeks between his fingers to see JOHNNY SOARING through the rising flames of the blistering inferno!

MACK
He's not gonna make it...

But then -- Johnny *emerges* from the flames and...just... barely reaches the landing ramp in the other end zone!

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
BLAZE HAS DONE IT!

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)
UNBELIEVABLE!

Mack smiles in wonder.

MACK
Well dip me in honey and throw me to the lesbians...

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Johnny Blaze has set a new --

But then he stops as he realizes -- *Johnny isn't coming back.*

SPORTS ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)
Hey...where's he going...?

Johnny rides up the steps of the stadium, past the neon concession stands, and right through the EXIT doors!

EXT. TEXAS STADIUM - DAY

Where Johnny rides like a man possessed! Over the sidewalk, through the parking lot, and onto a service road where we see ROAD CONSTRUCTION has blocked off the entrance ramp.

But Johnny won't stop now. He races up a CONSTRUCTION RAMP and leaps over the barbed-wire fence a la "The Great Escape!"

INT. NEWS VAN - DAY

Roxanne rides down the highway when -- JOHNNY -- pulls right up alongside her. Roxanne double-takes.

ROXANNE
Johnny?

JOHNNY
I have to talk to you!

ROXANNE
There's nothing to talk about.

JOHNNY
Yes there is! And you know it!

Roxanne bites her lip -- trying to hang tough as they delve into the past at sixty miles per hour...

ROXANNE
That was a long time ago...

JOHNNY
Not to me it wasn't.

STUART
(to Roxanne)
You want me to pull over?

ROXANNE
You want me to strangle you?

STUART
Moving on...

Stuart steps on the gas as Johnny veers over to his side.

JOHNNY
Come on, Stu! Gimme a break here!

STUART
(shrugging)
Sorry, dude. She's the *boss*...

ROXANNE
JOHNNY, LOOK OUT!

Johnny looks back to see -- A SEMI-TRUCK -- barreling RIGHT INTO CAMERA as Johnny drops back at the *very* last second!

ROXANNE
Are you crazy!?

JOHNNY
I think it's implied! Hang on!

He accelerates ahead of them before SCREECHING to a stop!

STUART
JESUS!

Stuart SLAMS ON THE BRAKES as the front fender of the news van skids to within an inch of Johnny's body! A chain-reaction of BRAKING TRAFFIC sounds behind them as Roxanne climbs out of the van and angrily marches towards him...

ROXANNE
You almost got yourself killed!

JOHNNY
I know. It's what I'm good at.

ROXANNE
What do you *want?*

Johnny looks into her eyes. His heart racing.

JOHNNY
I want to wake up back in Sweetwater again. I want to sit in the rafters over the Tunnel of Love and get my future read by some drunken old fortune teller. I want to wake up and not be filled with regret before I even get out of bed.

ROXANNE
We were just kids, Johnny...

JOHNNY
We were more than that. And you know it. We were soul mates.

Roxanne glares.

ROXANNE
Soul mates don't leave you behind.

There it is. Roxanne looks away.

JOHNNY
I never wanted to hurt you...

ROXANNE
Then why did you?

A BEAT. How can he even begin to explain...

JOHNNY
It seems like bad things always happen to the people I love. I didn't want you to get hurt, too.

ROXANNE
But I did. All the same.

JOHNNY
I know. I'm sorry.

Roxanne looks off.

JOHNNY
And I know that you're married now. And that you've put me in the past where I belong. But I just couldn't let you go again without telling you one last time...that I love you...
(beat)
Always and forever.

Roxanne looks away with tears in her eyes. A LONG BEAT. And then Johnny sadly turns back for his motorcycle as:

ROXANNE
It's my grandmother's.

He stops.

JOHNNY
What?

Roxanne holds up the diamond ring.

ROXANNE
I didn't want you to think I was still pining for you after all these years. It's too pathetic.

Johnny smiles as the sunset bathes them in a golden glow. And for a moment it's like we're back in Sweetwater again...

JOHNNY
So are you? Pining?

ROXANNE
After that speech?

She sighs and shakes her head.

ROXANNE
Like a forest...

They come together in a deep, lingering kiss. It's magic. Even the angry drivers have stopped honking their horns. They slowly pull apart as they get lost in the moment...

ROXANNE
We have to take this slow.

JOHNNY
Absolutely...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - ONE MINUTE LATER

MUSIC UP: SOLD MY SOUL - by Gare Du Nord

They fall through the door and onto the floor as their clothes come off in a flurry of pent-up passion...kissing and caressing as they roll over into -- a PUDDLE OF OIL.

ROXANNE
(between kisses)
Johnny...

JOHNNY
(oblivious)
Mmmm...?

ROXANNE
(moaning)
Your bike's leaking oil...

JOHNNY
(kissing)
She's not leaking oil...she's just markin' her territory...

We leave them like this; tangled up in a passionate embrace of arms and legs -- and high-performance motor oil.

CLOSE ON - THE MOTORCYCLE

As a TENDRIL OF BLUE HELLFIRE awakens within its engine...

EXT. DOWNTOWN ALLEY - NIGHT

A BRIEFCASE

hits the ground as we PULL BACK to reveal Blackheart holding a BUSINESSMAN up by his neck; a lit cigarette still clenched between his dead lips. The victim turns a DEEP BLUE COLOR as Blackheart plucks the cigarette from the man's mouth.

BLACKHEART
I'm losing my patience.

The Businessman blows into dust down the alleyway. And it's now that we realize the blue poison is a *litmus test* for Blackheart. He's been searching for someone special.

ESTABLISHING

As the lights along the alley begin to dim. A wicked smile creeps across Blackheart's face as he turns around to see --

THE STRANGER

standing at the other end of the alley. He looks exactly as we remember, down to that ominous SILVER SKULL cane.

THE STRANGER
Blackheart.

BLACKHEART
Mephistopheles.

They face off like two gunslingers...

BLACKHEART
I was wondering when you'd show.

The Stranger, now known by his true name, points his cane.

MEPHISTOPHELES
You have violated The Order.

BLACKHEART
There is no Order. Just a God who's lost interest and an Adversary who's lost *backbone*.

Mephistopheles GROWLS and starts for him. But then Blackheart blows on the red ember of his cigarette as...

FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

...the street lamps BURN ON in response. Mephistopheles cries out as he shields his eyes from the blinding lights.

BLACKHEART
Thousands of years old and you still can't stand the light. That's your problem, old man. You never *evolved*.

ESTABLISHING

Mephistopheles thumps his cane on the ground as the streetlights EXPLODE, raining glass upon the street.

MEPHISTOPHELES
What's to stop me from dragging your insolent soul back to Hell now?

BLACKHEART
This.

Blackheart reaches into his coat and pulls out --

THE SOUL CRYSTAL.

And for once even Mephistopheles is afraid...

BLACKHEART
One thousand of the blackest souls ever to walk this Godforsaken earth. Right here in the palm of my hand.

MEPHISTOPHELES
How...?

BLACKHEART
With a little help from my friends. You might say they were in their 'element.'

We hear a CHATTERING as Mephistopheles looks up to see --

THE HIDDEN

standing up on the rooftop; their coats billowing in the breeze like the outlaws in "ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST."

MEPHISTOPHELES
You've wasted your time. The Crystal can only be unlocked by a Pure Soul.

BLACKHEART
I'll find my Pure Soul. And when I do these streets will flow with the blood of the innocents.

Mephistopheles shakes his head.

MEPHISTOPHELES
I might have spared you, Blackheart. But this is in The Rider's hands now.

Blackheart smiles at the Soul Crystal.

BLACKHEART
And this is in mine. Evolution...

He flicks his cigarette into the street:

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
Ain't it a bitch?

Blackheart chuckles and turns away, leaving Mephistopheles behind. We PUSH INTO the eyes of the silver skull as we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

As his eyes BLINK OPEN. He looks over to see Roxanne lying beside him, even more beautiful in the innocence of sleep. He smiles. So happy. But as he turns over we reveal...

MEPHISTOPHELES

is sitting right there beside him!

MEPHISTOPHELES
It's time.

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

bolting awake to see -- *there's nobody there.* Roxanne stirs but continues sleeping as Johnny rubs his eyes.

JOHNNY
(sighs)
Just a dream...

He gets out of bed as we reveal ROMANTIC CANDLES around the bedroom. But as he passes...*the flames bend towards him.* Johnny slows to a stop. He steps forward and the flames go forward. He steps backwards and the flames follow suit.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Or a head injury...

But then Johnny stops as we reveal -- that Grace is *missing.* We hear REVVING outside as he looks out the window to see...

HIS MOTORCYCLE

waiting for him down in the street -- all by itself.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Definitely a head injury...

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

Johnny slowly steps over to his motorcycle. And as he does we notice the COLD FOG of his BREATH appear...

MEPHISTOPHELES (O.S.)
Johnny Blaze.

Johnny freezes.

JOHNNY
No...

A peal of UGLY LAUGHTER echoes off the brick buildings of Deep Ellum as Johnny calls out to the empty streets:

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Stay away from me...

MEPHISTOPHELES (O.S.)
Oh, it's a little late for that...

NEW ANGLE

as we reveal MEPHISTOPHELES stepping out from the shadows of the alley with his sinister silver skull cane in hand.

MEPHISTOPHELES (cont'd)
Phoenix. Denver. San Antonio.
Each city was another death for you.
But I was always there. Saving you.
From yourself. Waiting for the day
when I would need you most...

Mephistopheles stops on the other side of the motorcycle.

MEPHISTOPHELES (cont'd)
You were right, Johnny. It wasn't
an angel watching over you at all.

JOHNNY
(finally)
What do you want?

Mephistopheles runs his long, taloned finger across the handlebars of the motorcycle as they start to sizzle...

MEPHISTOPHELES
You are the host for The Spirit of
Vengeance. A wraith of the road that
keeps the Order between the spirit
worlds. It's laid dormant within you
since the day our deal was struck.

JOHNNY
Bullshit.

MEPHISTOPHELES
You must call upon it now to hunt down the one known as Blackheart. Bring him back to me. Alive.

JOHNNY
Why would I help you?

MEPHISTOPHELES
Because if you succeed...if you find this Blackheart and return him to me... I will release your soul.

A BEAT. Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY
I'll take my chances on my own.

MEPHISTOPHELES
Pride...

Mephistopheles smiles, savoring the word.

MEPHISTOPHELES (cont'd)
Without a doubt my favorite sin...

JOHNNY
Go to Hell.

Johnny turns away as:

MEPHISTOPHELES
You'll beat me there.

Johnny freezes. Then he turns back.

MEPHISTOPHELES
It's your choice, Johnny. Work for me *here*...or go with me *there*.

JOHNN
Not much of a choice, is it?

MEPHISTOPHELES
It never is...

Johnny glares as the devil smiles.

JOHNNY
What do I have to do?

MEPHISTOPHELES
Just ride...

Johnny looks to the waiting motorcycle.

JOHNNY
That's it?

MEPHISTOPHELES
The Spirit of Vengeance will do the rest.

Mephistopheles steps back into the shadows...

MEPHISTOPHELES
Remember: I want him alive.

Mephisto fades into the darkness, leaving Johnny alone.

JOHNNY
(whispering)
This is crazy...

Johnny shakes his head. He slowly reaches for the sizzling handlebar. And to his surprise it's cold to the touch.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
This isn't happening...

And then he *very carefully* lifts his leg over the seat as the rear tire begins SPINNING, building up a CLOUD OF EXHAUST more suited to a rocket launch than a Harley-Davidson.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
'Just ride' huh?

Johnny winces and *very gently* releases the clutch as...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Oh shit.

VRRROOOOOMMMM!

He rockets down the street in a BURST OF PRETERNATURAL FLAME!

...*so fast* that the asphalt is churned up in melted chunks!

...*so fast* that a trail of after-flame is left in his wake!

...*so fast* that his *cheeks ripple* from the G's he's pulling!

Windows SHATTER as he blasts past a line of parked cars, unleashing a CACOPHONY OF CAR ALARMS up and down the street!

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

As Roxanne stirs awake from all the noise outside....

ROXANNE
Johnny?

She wraps a sheet around her and knocks on the bathroom door.

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Are you in there?

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS - SAME

JOHNNY'S POV

As we're taken along on the world's most extreme roller-coaster ride! The SHEER VELOCITY warps downtown Dallas into a SCREAMING BLUR of liquefied steel and glass!

SMASH CUT TO:

A MOTORCYCLE COP

Hiding behind a ROAD SIGN with his SPEED GUN at the ready. We hear a DISTANT RUMBLING as he stops, puzzled, before...

WHOOOOOSH!

Johnny blasts by as the speed gun BURNS UP in his hand! He HOWLS and drops the flaming speed gun as we reveal the road sign he was hiding behind, melting into twisted metal:

"DRIVE FRIENDLY -- THE TEXAS WAY!"

EXT. TRINITY BRIDGE - NIGHT

The motorcycle comes to a SCREECHING HALT as ribbons of MELTED ASPHALT are dug up beneath the old iron bridge!

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

As starts to tremble. Rivulets of perspiration cascade down his forehead. He's literally BURNING UP inside.

JOHNNY
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME!

He SCREAMS as SMOKE rises from his eyes! Crackling COILS OF YELLOW FLAME snake out of his empty eye sockets as --

WHOOOOSH!

The flesh MELTS AWAY from Johnny's face! Streaming from his skull like liquid paraffin! The skull is stripped bare as a HALO OF YELLOW FLAME cloaks his grinning, bony features!

THE GHOST RIDER.

CAMERA CIRCLES the Ghost Rider as we reveal -- FLASHES of JOHNNY inside. He holds up his SKELETAL HAND in wonder and makes a fist, feeling the POWER SURGE through him. Our 360 MOVE ends on the SKELETAL GRIN of Ghost Rider as he speaks:

GHOST RIDER
VENGEANCE.

We hear BRAKES SCREECHING as Ghost Rider turns to see --

A SEMI-TRUCK

crashing right into him! Steam billows out from beneath the crushed engine as a chubby TRUCKER hops out wearing a cowboy hat and a horrified expression.

TRUCKER
Oh, Geez! Oh, Man! Are ya'll okay?

The Trucker freezes as he sees the gruesome visage of --

THE GHOST RIDER

Stepping out of the billowing cloud of steam!

TRUCKER
That ain't right...

The Ghost Rider SHOOTS out his FIST as the Trucker SCREAMS! A BEAT. And then we PULL BACK to reveal the Ghost Rider was reaching for a CHAIN padlocked to the truck's grill.

GHOST RIDER

effortlessly snaps the padlock and yanks the heavy chain free. A BLAST OF HELLFIRE ignites the links, giving the chain a life of its own. It SNAKES over his shoulder in a heavy metal version of the Old West Ghost Rider's bullwhip! He turns to the Trucker and points his skeletal finger:

GHOST RIDER
GO.

The Trucker doesn't have to be told twice and runs off down the empty street. We hear the sound of *CLAPPING* as --

BLACKHEART

steps out of the shadows applauding this performance.

BLACKHEART
Now that was impressive. Really. I've heard stories about the Rider ever since I was young. The Road Wraith. The Devil's Bounty Hunter. I must say you don't disappoint.

Ghost Rider points his finger at Blackheart and growls:

GHOST RIDER
VIOLATOR.

BLACKHEART
We're not going to have any sort of meaningful dialogue here, are we?

TCHINK. TCHINK. TCHINK. The fiery Hellchain is pulled through the Ghost Rider's skeletal fingers link by link.

GHOST RIDER
BACK TO HELL.

BLACKHEART
(sighs)
I didn't think so...

The FLAPPING OF WINGS cuts through the night as --

WHAAAAAM!

Ghost Rider is suddenly BLASTED off his feet in an oily BLUR of TEETH and TALONS! He slides for fifty yards across the asphalt before coming to a steaming stop!

SKINNER

drops down into the middle of the street as his leathery wings fold back into his long black duster once again.

BLACKHEART
Now listen carefully, and try to get this through that *thick skull* of yours: I'm not the one you should be fighting with. Mephistopheles is the one who has enslaved you. So you can either die out here in the street tonight...

Skinner grins malevolently and flexes his forearms as his spiked EXOSKELETON punches through his skin...

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
Or you can ask me for mercy.
And join us in the New Hell.

The Ghost Rider takes out his heavy chain...

GHOST RIDER
NO MERCY FOR ME.

...and whirls it overhead like an iron lasso.

GHOST RIDER
NO MERCY FOR YOU.

TCHINKKK!

The Ghost Rider LASSOES Skinner and ignites the red hot coils of his chain! Skinner SHRIEKS as Ghost Rider YANKS him off his feet and SLAMS HIM into the side of the semi!

ESTABLISHING

As we see the lights of two POLICE CARS approaching...

SKINNER

slices right through the links of the chain. He growls and starts for Ghost Rider until Blackheart stops him.

BLACKHEART
Think about my offer, Rider.

The police cars pull up as a BLINDING SPOTLIGHT shines into the Ghost Rider's face. The POLICE P.A. BOOMS:

POLICE P.A.
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!

The Ghost Rider GROWLS as he looks back over to see -- Blackheart and Skinner have escaped.

NEW ANGLE

OFFICER PLOOG and OFFICER AQUIERA step out of their squad cars with their hands on their holster as they react:

OFFICER AQUIERA
Get a look at this guy...

OFFICER PLOOG
Little early for Halloween, ain't it?

The Ghost Rider steps over to his broken chain as --

TCHINK! TCHINK! TCHINK!

The red hot coils fuse themselves back together before the fiery Hellchain snakes over his shoulder once again.

OFFICER AQUIERA
What in the hell...?

Officer Ploog draws his weapon as Aquiera follows suit.

OFFICER PLOOG
Drop the chain, freak show!

The Ghost Rider steps towards them...

OFFICER AQUIERA
H-He's coming for us, Mike!

OFFICER PLOOG
I SAID DROP THE WEAPON!

But Ghost Rider keeps coming until -- *BAM! BAM! BAM!* The Ghost Rider disappears in a BURST OF MUZZLE FLASH!

THE POLICEMEN'S POV

As Ghost Rider steps through the smoke to reveal -- tongues of flame leaking from the holes in his chest!

GHOST RIDER

grabs Officer Aquiera by the neck and lifts him off the ground. He stares into his horrified eyes before:

GHOST RIDER
INNOCENT.

Ghost Rider tosses him twenty feet through the air where he crashes onto the hood of the crushed big-rig.

NEW ANGLE

Ghost Rider turns to face Officer Ploog as -- *CRACK!* -- the policeman smashes him across the face with his baton!

CLOSE UP - GHOST RIDER

As he looks back to reveal his jaw's come unhinged. He resets it with a *BONY CRACK* as Ploog runs for his car!

IN THE SQUAD CAR

The policeman starts the engine and locks the doors.

THE GHOST RIDER

clenches his skeletal fingers as we go...

INSIDE THE POLICE CAR'S ENGINE

A series of MACRO SHOTS as we move amongst the pistons, cylinders, and intake manifolds. The vaporized fuel begins to ignite -- but then the miniature explosion contracts and implodes upon itself before we go...

BACK OUTSIDE

To reveal the car won't start. Somehow, the Ghost Rider has extinguished the flames with the police car's engine!

OFFICER PLOOG
Get away from me!

NEW ANGLE

A white-hot HEAT HAZE generates from the Ghost Rider's fists as he SLICES through the squad car door like a human oxyacetylene torch, *chopping the vehicle apart!*

ON THE POLICEMAN

cowering as the Ghost Rider peels back the roof of the car like tin foil and lifts the officer out by his neck.

GHOST RIDER
LOOK INTO MY EYES.

Ghost Rider pulls him close, forcing him to stare into --

THE GHOST RIDER'S EYES.

Hungry black sockets that suck the fire from the air. The Officer tries to scream as he stares into those awful pits as we see IMAGES from his past spark to life before us:

FLASH! We SEE Officer Ploog planting evidence.

FLASH! We SEE Officer Ploog beating a witness.

FLASH! We SEE Officer Ploog shooting an unarmed man.

The images come fast and furious, rapid-fire mini-movies of every horrible thing he's ever done in his miserable life.

OFFICER PLOOG
W-What? What are you doing?

A BLUE FLASH flares within the Ghost Rider's eyes as we see the SAME IMAGES repeat themselves -- but with one big difference. *This time Officer Ploog is the victim!*

GHOST RIDER
YOUR SOUL IS STAINED BY THE BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT. FEEL THEIR PAIN.

Ploog tries to scream but the air is gone from his lungs.

GHOST RIDER (CONT'D)
A HUNDRED FOLD.

Every act of violence, every evil he's ever committed, is revisited back upon him. This is the PENANCE STARE. And compared to this, death would be a welcome relief.

OFFICER PLOOG

falls to the ground, shuddering and glassy-eyed; his brain on eternal overload as he relives his sins forevermore...

THE GHOST RIDER

WAVES HIS FIST as his motorcycle races to his side. And as he touches the tank his Hellfire SUPERCHARGES the cycle!

The fairing morphs into a SKULL-SHAPED WINDSHIELD with headlights for eyes as the tires EXPLODE into CIRCLES OF FIRE!

THE HELLCYCLE.

It SNARLS like a wild beast as Ghost Rider races off in a concussive burst of flame! A BEAT. And then CAMERA PANS past the bumper sticker on the back of the smashed semi-truck ("HOW IS MY DRIVING? CALL 1-800...) to reveal --

JOHNNY'S LICENSE PLATE

spinning like a top over the burning street...

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

Roxanne is muttering to herself as she gets dressed...

ROXANNE
You promised yourself you wouldn't do this. You vowed that you wouldn't get hurt. And what happens? You take one look at those puppy dog eyes and *BAM!* You're rolling around naked in a pool of oil like "Girls Gone Wild.'

She angrily yanks on her boots. And then she sighs:

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Damn you, Johnny Blaze...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - EARLY MORNING

Where we see the Ghost Rider's Hellcycle start to sputter. And then CAMERA CRANES UP over the hill to reveal why...

THE SUN.

It rises over the horizon, casting a crimson flush over the green valley. At last we know Ghost Rider's Achilles heel.

GHOST RIDER

stumbles off of the motorcycle and crawls along the ground. The flickering Hellfire coursing over his skull snuffs out as Johnny's body begins *regenerating from the inside out.*

First the muscles and ligaments, then the inner corium, and finally the epidermal layer. Johnny trembles, desperately reaching for something, before finally touching a tree.

WIDER - to reveal it's the old OAK TREE on Crowley Hill. Still visible in the trunk of the tree are the words:

Always & Forever

The memory BURNS from his touch. And then a SHOVEL is thrust in the earth beside him as Johnny looks up to see --

CARETAKER.

The mysterious old man from the cemetery.

CARETAKER
Nice goin', bonehead.

He spits a stream of tobacco juice as Johnny passes out.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. NEWS STATION - MORNING

Roxanne steps over to the bank of video monitors where Stuart is editing their Johnny Blaze segment together...

STUART
Oh, good. You're here. Tell me what you think about this --

ROXANNE
What do I think? I think that I was a fool to believe that Johnny Blaze could ever change. 'Always and Forever?' What a joke. He couldn't even make it to breakfast.

Stuart blinks.

STUART
I meant the segment.

A BEAT.

ROXANNE
Right...

Roxanne's cell phone rings as she flips it open:

ROXANNE
(into the phone)
Roxanne Simpson...oh, hi, Mike... our flight's not until five, why?

Stuart looks over as she smiles...

ROXANNE
Yeah, it *is* a good thing we're still here...okay, we're on it...thanks!

She hangs up and turns to Stuart.

ROXANNE
A story's breaking here in Dallas. The Boss wants us to run with it.

Stuart grins.

STUART
Hell-o Prime Time...

EXT. CARETAKER'S SHACK - MORNING

JOHNNY'S POV - as his blurry world focuses to reveal the craggy, scowling face of Caretaker staring down at us.

JOHNNY
AHH!

ON JOHNNY

as he scoots back from the old man...

CARETAKER
Don't thank me all at once.

Johnny looks around to see that he's laying on the back porch of a shack with the sprawling graveyard before him.

JOHNNY
Why am I in a graveyard...?

Caretaker spits a stream of tobacco juice.

CARETAKER
First come. First served.

Johnny just stares.

CARETAKER
That was a joke, kid.

JOHNNY
Right...

Johnny starts to get up but grimaces with pain. He may have been invincible last night as the Ghost Rider, but this morning as Johnny Blaze he's feeling it. Big time.

JOHNNY
What happened to me last night?
I feel like I got hit by a truck.

Caretaker chuckles.

JOHNNY
Did I say something funny?

CARETAKER
Ironic. We're big on irony here.

Caretaker pours a cup of sludgy black coffee.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
What's the last thing that you
remember from last night?

Johnny shakes his head. But then he winces as:

JOHNNY
Roxanne...

And the thought of abandoning her again hurts worse than any of his injuries ever could.

CARETAKER
A girl. Typical.

Caretaker hands him the cup of coffee.

CARETAKER
What about after that?

JOHNNY
All I can remember...is rage.

Johnny sips the coffee as his stomach lurches...

CARETAKER
You're still just a host body for the Spirit of Vengeance. But pretty soon you'll start to get control over it. And with control comes the memories...
(beat)
Whether you want 'em or not.

We CLOSE ON Johnny's reaction...

EXT. SAN VENGANZA - DAY

A SCORPION

scurries across the barren dessert floor with the forgotten ghost town of San Venganza in the b.g. It suddenly stops and raises its tail, sensing a predator, before a HAND suddenly shoots up out of the ground and YANKS it beneath the surface!

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - SAME

Gressil tears into the scorpion as if it were lobster meat before scuttling down into a labyrinthine MAZE OF CAVERNS. Here, hidden from the deadly sunlight, massive crystal stalactites make for an eerie, otherworldly terrain.

WALLOW (O.S.)
The Rider is strong.

WIDER - to reveal The Hidden have set up camp here. We see a disturbance in the CHANNEL OF WATER that flows through the caverns before Wallow rises up from beneath the surface.

SKINNER (O.S.)
He's not that strong...

We PAN OVER to reveal Skinner glowering, his leathery skin still scorched and swollen from the Ghost Rider's chain.

GRESSIL
(smirking)
So that's <u>sunburn</u> then?

Skinner's sharp bones punch out of his skin as he growls:

SKINNER
I'll separate the meat from your bones, you bottom feeder...

BLACKHEART (O.S.)
That's <u>enough</u>.

They turn to see Blackheart in the mouth of the cave.

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
Wallow is right. This Rider is different from those in the past. He has a *reason* to fight...

SKINNER
The Spirit of Vengeance has always been constant. It doesn't change.

BLACKHEART
No. But the host body does. The Adversary has claimed his soul. But someone else has claimed his <u>heart</u>.

Blackheart steps over to the Soul Crystal that sits atop a majestic stalactite shrine and gazes into its eyes.

BLACKHEART
We must find who holds his heart -- and then cut the reason <u>out</u>.

Skinner smiles as he sharpens his cleavers...

EXT. CARETAKER'S SHACK - DAY

Where Caretaker is disinfecting Johnny's shoulder wound. His calloused hands move deftly. He's done this before.

JOHNNY
Why me?

CARETAKER
The Spirit is a Rider. A Road Wraith. And you're the greatest Rider there is.

JOHNNY
I'm not the right guy for this. I don't even have any faith...

CARETAKER
So get some. It doesn't have to be in God. Faith can come from anywhere.

Caretaker holds up a needle.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
Sterilize this for me.

Johnny just looks at him.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
Go on.

Johnny tentatively reaches out and touches the needle as a spark of BLUE FLAME burns across the steel. Johnny shakes his head. Then he winces as Caretaker starts stitching...

CARETAKER
The thing you fought last night was an Elemental Demon. An aerial one by the looks of these talon marks.

JOHNNY
Elemental...?

CARETAKER
(nodding)
They call themselves The Hidden. And they've existed in this world long before the advent of man.

JOHNNY
You're telling me that these things can be anywhere? Any time?

CARETAKER
Not anytime. They're nocturnal, like you. During the day your body is your own. But once the sun sets you're on demon duty. Get near 'em and you're gonna pop like a tick.

Johnny suddenly stops as:

JOHNNY
I remember something...

He takes a deep breath...tortured by the memory...

JOHNNY
There was a policeman...a dirty cop...I could see all the terrible things he's ever done...and then I turned them against him. Big time.

CARETAKER
The Penance Stare. It sears the souls of the wicked. Pray you're never on the receiving end.

JOHNNY
So why didn't I use it against the Hidden last night?

CARETAKER
Because...demons don't have souls.

Johnny shakes his head. This can't be happening.

JOHNNY
I keep thinking...that any moment I'll wake up and this will be over...

CARETAKER
If you ever do, do me a favor...
(finishes the stitch)
...and wake me, *too.*

JOHNNY
How do you know about all this? Why are you helping me, anyway?

CARETAKER
Let's just say that I'm payin' for some mistakes of my own... and leave it at that.

Caretaker starts to wash up as Johnny gets to his feet.

CARETAKER (CONT'D)
You should get some rest...

Johnny grabs his leather jacket.

JOHNNY
I can rest when I'm dead.

He stops when he sees it's riddled with BULLET HOLES.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Which, from the looks of things, should be some time tonight...

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS - MORNING

As Johnny rides through downtown we see the destruction left behind from last night. Broken glass litters the streets while the smashed truck and shredded squad car have been cordoned off with yellow police tape.

JOHNNY
Jesus...

Live NEWS TEAMS are lining up and down the street...

NEWS REPORTER #1
...it looks like something out of a war zone down here as clean up crews continue to work around the clock...

NEWS REPORTER #2
...authorities believe an underground gas leak may be to blame for the...

ROXANNE
...and while Dallas Police continue to investigate, at least one local man says he knows what's to blame...

CLOSE ON - ROXANNE

As Stuart calls it from behind the camera:

STUART
Insert Crazy Trucker Clip here and three...two...

ROXANNE
(closing out)
Roxanne Simpson, WABC-TV New York.

STUART
Aaannd we're out.

Roxanne takes off her microphone transmitter.

ROXANNE
You really think he's crazy?

STUART
The guy who claimed he collided with a flaming skeleton? Yeah. I think there's potential...

Roxanne chuckles before turning around to see --

JOHNNY

Standing before her. Her smile quickly dissipates.

JOHNNY
Hi...

ROXANNE
Hey...

Roxanne takes out her Blackberry as Johnny fidgets.

JOHNNY
It seems like every time I see you
I'm apologizing for something...

ROXANNE
(checking messages)
It sure does seem that way...

She starts for the news van as Johnny trails behind her.

JOHNNY
I'm sorry about last night...

ROXANNE
Can we just skip this part?

JOHNNY
Let me try to explain...

Johnny takes her hand as Roxanne turns around and crosses her arms, waiting. Johnny takes a deep breath before:

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I'm...I'm going through some
changes in my life right now...

ROXANNE
(groaning)
Oh spare me...

JOHNNY
I'm telling you the truth...

ROXANNE
What kind of changes?

JOHNNY
I...I can't tell you...

ROXANNE
Perfect...

She turns away as he takes her hand...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I know this sounds crazy. But I need you to believe in me now...

ROXANNE
Why?

Johnny looks to her with pleading eyes.

JOHNNY
So I can believe in <u>myself</u>.

Roxanne looks into his eyes. He means it.

JOHNNY
Have faith in me. Please.

A LONG BEAT.

ROXANNE
You're *killing* me. You know that?

She lets him put his arms around her.

JOHNNY
I'm going to get through this. And after you get back to New York--

ROXANNE
I'm not going back. Not yet.

JOHNNY
What?

ROXANNE
The station wants me to stay here to cover the Ghost Rider story.

JOHNNY
'Ghost Rider?'

ROXANNE
That's what they're calling it. Some people claim that all this was <u>his</u> doing. Of course, nobody got any photographs or video *while* it was doing it. Typical urban legend stuff. But the viewers love it.

JOHNNY
What if it's real?

Roxanne smiles. Johnny doesn't.

ROXANNE
The flaming skeleton?

JOHNNY
It could be some kind of maniac in disguise. I don't think it's safe to be out there chasing this...

He can't bring himself to say it.

ROXANNE
'Ghost Rider?'

JOHNNY
Right...

ROXANNE
I can take care of myself. Besides...
(she kisses him)
I *like* dangerous men.

JOHNNY
So you forgive me?

ROXANNE
Not so fast. I'm having dinner with my father tonight. I want you to join us. Consider it your penance.

JOHNNY
He's still <u>alive</u>?

She gives him a look.

JOHNNY
Kidding...

ROXANNE
So will you come?

JOHNNY
Rox...your father hates me...

ROXANNE
You're not still afraid of him?

JOHNNY
No. I'm *terrified* of him.

ROXANNE
Then do it for me. Please.

JOHNNY
I-I can't do it tonight...

ROXANNE
What about tomorrow night?

JOHNNY
(wincing)
I can't do...*nights*...

ROXANNE
(exasperated)
You know what? Forget it.

Roxanne starts for the van until:

JOHNNY
What time?

She turns back:

ROXANNE
Eight o'clock at Dunston's?

JOHNNY
(finally)
I'll be there...

Roxanne smiles.

ROXANNE
I have faith in you.

She gets into the van as they drive off down the street. Johnny turns away as we PUSH THROUGH the wreckage to...

A FORENSICS INVESTIGATOR.

FORENSICS INSPECTOR
I've got something...

He pulls a chunk of TWISTED METAL from the rubble and wipes away the blackened soot to reveal --

A LICENSE PLATE.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SKYLINE - DUSK

As the sunset sends a glorious orange reflection over the glass and steel skyscrapers of Downtown Dallas...

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Johnny finishes shaving before staring back at his reflection in the mirror. He searches for signs of change; like a werewolf on the eve of a full moon.

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

The elevator doors open onto the street as Johnny wheels his motorcycle outside. But then he stops as we reveal a fiery, red-haired CAPTAIN DOLAN waiting for him.

CAPT. DOLAN
Johnathan Blaze?

JOHNNY
Yeah?

Capt. Dolan flashes his badge.

CAPT. DOLAN
Captain Dolan. D.P.D.

JOHNNY
Is there a problem?

ESTABLISHING

To reveal an ARMADA OF POLICE CARS surrounding them!

CAPT. DOLAN
You could say that...

INT. DUNSTON'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It's a classy dinner restaurant overlooking Downtown Dallas. Roxanne and Quentin are seated at their table. Even at his advanced age, Quentin still cuts an imposing figure. A WAITER steps over and hands them a wine list.

WAITER
Will it be just the two of you?

ROXANNE
We're waiting for one more...

EXT. SOUTH DALLAS PRECINCT - NIGHT

An ugly, brick building in the heart of downtown...

CAPT. DOLAN (V.O.)
Those things will kill you...

INT. SOUTH DALLAS PRECINCT/INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

As Johnny lights up a cigarette, muttering:

JOHNNY
They'll have to get in line...

CAPT. DOLAN
Let's go through this again...

JOHNNY
I told you everything I know.

A young OFFICER MACKIE slides a folder across the desk before opening it to reveal a series of photographs...

OFFICER MACKIE
We found your license plate and a tread match at the crime scene...

CAPT. DOLAN
And we know that the perp was a biker who used some kind of <u>fire</u> effect...

OFFICER MACKIE
You use flame guns in your stunt shows. Don't you, Mr. Blaze?

JOHNNY
Gimme a break...

CAPT. DOLAN
(voice rising)
Give you a *break?* I've got a 22 year veteran of the D.P.D., one of the toughest sons a bitches I've ever known, and he can't stop crying. I got a rookie who took such a blow to the head that he can't remember his middle name, let alone what happened last night. And I got more people reported <u>missing</u> in the last 48 hours than we've had in four years!

Capt. Dolan SLAMS his fist down onto the table.

CAPT. DOLAN (cont'd)
So why don't you give <u>me</u> a break?

JOHNNY
I want my phone call.

Capt. Dolan shakes his head in disgust.

CAPT. DOLAN
I hope it's to a good lawyer.

INT. DUNSTON'S RESTAURANT - LATER

Roxanne's smile is long gone by now. Quentin signs for the check as Roxanne stands from the table, humiliated.

QUENTIN
I tried to tell you, honey...

ROXANNE
Don't. Please...

They start for the door when the HOSTESS calls over:

HOSTESS
Miss Simpson? You have a phone call.

INT. DALLAS COUNTY JAIL - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Where Johnny is using his one phone call:

JOHNNY
Roxanne?

INTER-CUT SEQUENCE

ROXANNE
Is this some kind of sick joke?
To see how far you can push me?

JOHNNY
I was on my way there, I swear.
But then...something came up...

ROXANNE
How do you expect me to have faith
in you when won't tell me the truth?

JOHNNY
You won't believe the truth...

ROXANNE
I don't believe you <u>now</u>!

Johnny takes a deep breath before:

JOHNNY
That thing you're chasing...

ROXANNE
You mean the Ghost Rider?

A LONG BEAT before he whispers:

JOHNNY
It's me.

We CLOSE ON Roxanne as:

ROXANNE
Oh...my...God...
(beat)
You really *are* crazy, aren't you?

JOHNNY
(sighs)
Roxanne...

ROXANNE
You need professional help...

JOHNNY
I'm telling you the truth --

ROXANNE
Stop it! Stop!

Johnny stops as Roxanne fights back the tears.

ROXANNE
I can't take this anymore. Okay? Please, Johnny. If you care about me at all...just leave me alone.

CLICK. Johnny bows his head against the receiver as a JAILHOUSE GUARD steps over and yanks him off his feet.

GUARD
Okay, Blaze. Let's go.

INT. DALLAS COUNTY JAIL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Guard leads Johnny down a pale green corridor to a large holding cell at the end, where a DOZEN INMATES glare back at us from beneath a sickly fluorescent light. It's a cesspool of depravity. Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY
You don't wanna put me in there...

GUARD
Sorry. The Ritz was booked.

The Guard SHOVES him inside and SLAMS the door shut as the other inmates flash ugly smiles...

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - A "MISSING" POSTER

It's the Punk with the pierced tongue. We PAN OVER the brick wall to see a dozen more like it. All victims of The Hidden. Roxanne stands beside them as she reports:

ROXANNE
At last count 23 people have been reported missing in the Metro area. With investigators worried that this could be just the beginning...

CLOSE ON - ROXANNE

closing out her live report:

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Roxanne Simpson. WABC - New York.

STUART
Aaaand we're *out*. Great, Roxy.

Stuart breaks down his camera as Roxanne shivers.

ROXANNE
It's like a ghost town down here...

STUART
People are scared. I don't blame 'em.

ROXANNE
You're not actually starting to *believe* in the Ghost Rider, are you?

STUART
I'm not saying I do and I'm not saying I don't. But somebody is making these people disappear... and I'm not anxious to find out who.

They stop at the sound of TEETH CHATTERING overhead...

ROXANNE
Did you hear that?

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

A SKINHEAD wearing a STUDDED LEATHER JACKET steps through the crowd to where Johnny is sitting in the corner...

SKINHEAD
You look like that Johnny Blaze...

JOHNNY
Yeah. I get that all the time.

The Skinhead peers into his face as:

SKINHEAD
Nah, that is you! You're him! I saw you jump at the state fair a few years ago. I paid ten bucks to see you splatter. But you *didn't*.

JOHNNY
Sorry to disappoint you.

A REDNECK dressed in military fatigues steps up.

REDNECK
You might be a big shot out there, Blaze. But in here you're just another monkey in the cage.

JOHNNY
I'm not looking for trouble...

REDNECK
Looks like trouble found *you*.

The Redneck punches Johnny in the stomach. The Skinhead spins him around and admires Johnny's dinner jacket.

SKINHEAD
Nice Jacket...

He throws Johnny up against the wall as they jump on him like a pack of wolves!

REDNECK
I get his boots!

OTHER VOICES
Gimme that watch! etc...

A YOUNG MAN steps over, timidly trying to help...

YOUNG MAN
Come on, man. Leave 'em alone.

SKINHEAD
Get lost!

...and gets BACKHANDED for his effort! Johnny gets lost under a barrage of punches and kicks until --

WHOOOOOSH!

The inmates are BLASTED BACK against the walls of the cell! A burning WHITE-HOT HEAT HAZE clears to reveal...

A GRINNING SKULL

surrounded by a nimbus of coursing yellow flame! The heat sets off the SPRINKLER SYSTEM, but the Ghost Rider's hellfire seems to feed on the shower! He steps up to the big Skinhead and grabs him by the neck. He lifts him off his feet before noticing his studded leather jacket:

GHOST RIDER
NICE JACKET.

SMASH CUT TO:

A ZIPPER

Pulling up the black leather jacket as -- *POP POP POP* -- the METAL STUDS pop out into spikes over his shoulders! This is the classic Tex Aquiera rendition of Ghost Rider.

And it's literally bad to the bone.

INT. PRISON SURVEILLANCE ROOM - SAME

Where a SURVEILLANCE GUARD is passing the time by playing the new PlayStation 2 game --*"JOHNNY BLAZE: AIRTIME."*

VIDEO GAME
"And Blaze is down!"

SURVEILLANCE GUARD
(muttering)
This game is impossible...

And then he freezes as he sees the Ghost Rider on the surveillance cameras, laying waste to the holding cell!

SURVEILLANCE GUARD
HOLY CRAP!

INT. IMPOUND GARAGE - NIGHT

A beleaguered IMPOUND WORKER works his way through the crowded garage, filling out evidence reports. Johnny's motorcycle sits among dozens of other seized vehicles when, suddenly, the engine ROARS TO LIFE!

IMPOUND WORKER
What the hell...?

VROOOOOM!

The Harley suddenly BURSTS INTO FLAMES, knocking the Impound Worker back! The Impound Worker hits the floor as the Hellcycle JUMPS OVER him and races up the exit!

INT. DALLAS COUNTY JAIL - SAME

As we reveal EVERY INMATE is on the ground, feeling the wrath of the Spirit of Vengeance! Everyone, that is, but the Young Man. Ghost Rider points a bony finger at him.

GHOST RIDER
YOU...

The Young Man trembles for a BEAT.

GHOST RIDER (cont'd)
INNOCENT.

The Ghost Rider turns and marches down the hallway as the Young Man wavers -- and faints to the floor!

EXT. DALLAS COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

Ghost Rider marches out to find his loyal Hellcycle waiting. It circles around him, creating a PROTECTIVE RING OF FIRE. Behind him we see the lit **G-A-R-A-G-E** sign over the impound.

SURVEILLANCE GUARD
HOLD IT!

The Surveillance Guard OPENS FIRE! He EMPTIES HIS CLIP as the Ghost Rider turns and stares. A LONG BEAT.

SURVEILLANCE GUARD
My bad...

The Ghost Rider rides off in a TORRID BURST of flame. The exhaust shatters the top three letters of the sign over the impound, leaving **R-A-G-E** shimmering like a warning to all!

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS - NIGHT

Roxanne and Stuart look up to the night sky as we hear more CHATTERING followed by a sudden gust of hot air.

STUART (cont'd)
I-I think we should go...

We hear the sound of leathery wings FLAPPING overhead as a SINISTER SHADOW passes over their frightened faces...

ROXANNE
Yeah...

INT. NEWS VAN - SAME

As Stuart tries to start the van. But it won't turn over. The sound of FLAPPING and CHATTERING is circling now...

STUART
C'mon c'mon c'mon!

ROXANNE
Gotta go, Stuart...

THUMP-THUMP!

Something lands on the roof of the van!

ROXANNE
WHAT IS THAT?

STUART
I DON'T KNOW!

CHUK! CHUK! CHUK!

The metal roof is being <u>shredded</u> by RAZOR-SHARP BONES!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DEALEY PLAZA - NIGHT

As the Ghost Rider ROCKETS through downtown -- the distant sounds of violence calling to him like a siren's song!

INT. NEWS VAN - NIGHT

As BLOOD-RED EYES peer through the torn roof! Roxanne and Stuart are both screaming now until -- *THWOOM!* -- the creature is blasted off the roof by a BURST OF FLAME!

EXT. NEWS VAN - NIGHT

Where we see the smoking body of a WINGED DEMON lying in the middle of the road; it's wings threaded with sharpened bones. Roxanne and Stuart timidly peek out of the van to see --

THE GHOST RIDER

Standing tall in the street like the Sheriff in "High Noon."

ROXANNE
Get the camera...

STUART
Are you <u>crazy</u>?

Roxanne gives him a look before Stuart grabs the video camera. In the distance we see POLICE SIRENS approaching. The Ghost Rider turns and pumps his fists in the air as --

WHOOSH!

A WALL OF FLAME erupts before the oncoming police cars, blocking them out! Roxanne and Stuart watch in awe as the Ghost Rider walks past them. But then he <u>stops</u>.

CLOSE ON - GHOST RIDER

Staring back at Roxanne with those bottomless pits. But then we see a *flicker* in his hellfire followed by --

A FLASH of BLUE EYES.

It only lasts for a split second and then it's gone.

CLOSE ON - ROXANNE

Blinking. Confused. Did she really just see that?

CLOSE ON - GHOST RIDER

As CAMERA CIRCLES 360 DEGREES around him to reveal -- JOHNNY -- imprisoned within. He clenches his fingers towards them as their car engine suddenly ROARS to life. He SHOUTS -- but as we complete our 360 MOVE his voice comes out in the MECHANICAL LION'S ROAR of Ghost Rider:

GHOST RIDER
GET AWAY!

Roxanne SCREAMS. Stuart drops the camera and jumps on the gas pedal as they squeal off down the street.

THE GHOST RIDER

turns to face off against the winged demon. The demon stands and wipes its wings over its body, before reappearing as --

SKINNER.

SKINNER
Well, well, well...

TCHINK! The Ghost Rider unhooks his heavy chain...

SKINNER (cont'd)
We meet again.

CHUK! -- a sharp knife-bone pierces Ghost Rider's heart!

SKINNER (cont'd)
The name is Skinner.

CHUK! CHUK! CHUK! Three more KNIFE-BONES pierce his chest!

SKINNER (cont'd)
Take it to your grave.

Ghost Rider GROWLS as he ignites his body with a white hot heat haze. Turning the knife-bones to dust. Skinner's eyes go wide as the Ghost Rider marches for him.

GHOST RIDER
YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED HIDDEN.

Ghost Rider WHIPS his flaming Hellchain like a lion tamer! *CRACK!* Skinner HOWLS as he LEAPS onto the Ghost Rider! Bones punch out from his body like porcupine quills as he stabs wildly into the Ghost Rider's leather-clad torso!

SKINNER
THIS IS OUR TIME!

Ghost Rider is taking the worst of it until:

VOICE
Hey, Ugly...

Skinner turns to see -- A SHOVEL -- SMACKING him across the face! *CLAAANG!* The demon is knocked back as we reveal --

CARETAKER.

He spits a stream of tobacco juice.

CARETAKER
Time's up.

The flaming skull of the Ghost Rider begins to FLICKER until it's finally snuffed out, leaving a beaten Johnny Blaze behind. Skinner gets to his feet and smiles...

SKINNER
(licking his lips)
Two souls for the reaping...

Skinner flashes his BONE BLADES as he rushes for Caretaker. But in a flash -- *CHA-CHUK* - Caretaker's shovel transforms into a makeshift SHOTGUN! He pulls the trigger as:

KA-BOOM!

Skinner is BLASTED BACK through the air! But as the gunpowder clears we reveal -- Skinner getting to his feet.

JOHNNY
He's too strong...

Caretaker suddenly turns and sticks the shotgun barrel *up against Johnny's lips!* Johnny's eyes go wide as:

JOHNNY
Whoa! Hey!

CARETAKER
Blow.

JOHNNY
What -- ?

CARETAKER
BLOW!

Johnny BLOWS into the barrel as a TENDRIL OF BLUE HELLFIRE snakes into the shotgun, charging it with pure hellfire!

ON SKINNER

Smiling as he marches right for them...

SKINNER
You cannot stop us, fleshling...

Skinner flashes his talons and shrieks:

SKINNER (cont'd)
We are The Hidden!

Skinner leaps for them just as Caretaker SPINS AROUND and sticks the shotgun barrel up against the demon's nose!

CARETAKER
Hide from this.

THWOOOOOM!

A BLAST OF HELLFIRE scorches the demon's face! Skinner gives an UNHOLY SHRIEK as the Hellfire courses over his bony body before he finally decomposes into a pile of YELLOW SULFUR!

ON CARETAKER

As he holsters the HELLFIRE SHOTGUN.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
C'mon, bonehead...

He spits a stream of tobacco juice.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
Let's go home.

Caretaker helps Johnny into his pickup truck as we slowly PULL BACK to reveal -- BLACKHEART -- watching from the rooftops overhead alongside Gressil and Wallow.

BLACKHEART
The Rider has shown us his heart...

The Hidden CHATTER anxiously as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EYEWITNESS NEWS STATION - NIGHT

Roxanne is in the editing room going over the footage from tonight. On the monitor the Ghost Rider DOUBLE PUMPS his fist, creating a WALL OF FIRE to rise up before the arriving police cars. Roxanne hits REWIND and watches it again.

ROXANNE
(muttering)
This is crazy...

She takes the video off the shelf labeled "BLAZE SEGMENT" and inserts it into the machine. The piece is a combination of her interview with Johnny and his past career highlights.

JOHNNY ON T.V.
I'm a highly trained professional...

The piece has (mercifully) cut around Johnny's stumbling on-camera interview to show CLIPS from his daredevil jumps...

JOHNNY ON T.V. (cont'd)
And what I do...

Quick CUTS now of Johnny CRASHING, Johnny PUMPING HIS FISTS as flames erupt over Texas Stadium, Johnny riding wheelies...

JOHNNY ON T.V. (cont'd)
Is extremely...extremely...

Johnny crashes brutally at the Alamodome...

JOHNNY ON T.V. (cont'd)
Dangerous.

Roxanne REWINDS the tape to Johnny PUMPING HIS FISTS. It's his signature move -- the one that signals the pyrotechnics.

JOHNNY ON T.V
...extremely...

She cues up the Ghost Rider tape as they play side-by-side:

JOHNNY ON T.V.
...extremely...

And there it is. It's an exact match.

ROXANNE
(breathless)
Oh my God...

We CLOSE ON the monitors. One with a FREEZE-FRAME of the Ghost Rider. The other a FREEZE-FRAME of Johnny Blaze. He was telling her the truth after all.

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Johnny...?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CARETAKER'S SHACK - NEXT MORNING

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

Wincing as the pain washes over him from last night's battle with Skinner. He looks around for Caretaker.

JOHNNY
Caretaker?

NEW ANGLE

As Johnny steps over to the oldest part of the cemetery to find Caretaker standing before TWO HEADSTONES. Johnny turns away to give Caretaker his privacy when:

CARETAKER
You okay, kid?

Johnny turns back.

JOHNNY
Yeah. You?

Caretaker spits in agreement. A BEAT.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Is that...?

CARETAKER
My wife and daughter.

JOHNNY
I'm sorry...

CARETAKER
(lost in thought)
My wife died first. It was the cancer that got her. My little girl was all I had after that. So when she got Tuberculosis, well, it was more than I could take. I went out to the crossroads and I prayed. Said I'd give <u>anything</u> to make her better. And then He showed up. Said he could answer my prayers...

JOHNNY
(remembering)
'For a price.'

Caretaker nods sadly.

CARETAKER
It wasn't more than a week later that she slipped into pneumonia. Of course He only promised to save her from the T.B. -- the pneumonia? Well, that was just dumb luck.

Johnny nods. Understanding all too well.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
He's always good to his word. It's what he *doesn't* say that damns you.

JOHNNY
I'll get him back somehow. For both of us. I promise you that.

CARETAKER
(tired smile)
Sure, kid. Sure...

EXT. HAVEN HOMES - DAY

A brick nursing home outside of Dallas. Roxanne gets out of her car and checks the address from a scrap of paper.

INT. HAVEN HOMES - DAY

Five OLD WOMEN are playing poker around a card table. We CIRCLE THEM as they wait impatiently for one to go...

OLD WOMAN #1
Hurry up, Florence.

OLD WOMAN #2
We don't have all day...

OLD WOMAN #3
And in our case, we mean that...

OLD WOMAN #4
Quiet! I'm thinking...

And as CAMERA FINISHES CIRCLING we reveal Old Woman #5 is none other than -- CLARA MENNINGER. She can't take it.

CLARA
Christ on a crutch, Florence, fold already. You've got a Jack high and Emma's sittin' on a full house.

They all groan and throw in their cards.

OLD WOMAN #2
Damnit it, Clara!

OLD WOMAN #1
You promised you wouldn't!

OLD WOMAN #3
She ruins every game...

We see Roxanne step over. Clara's back is to her.

ROXANNE
Excuse me? I'm looking for --

CLARA
Little Roxanne Simpson.

Clara turns around and smiles warmly.

CLARA (cont'd)
What took you so long?

EXT. CEMETERY - DUSK

Johnny readies his motorcycle for the hunt when he hears the sound of GALLOPING in the valley. He looks to see --

A LONE FIGURE

riding on horseback across the hillside. Caretaker steps over as they watch the phantom rider together in silence.

JOHNNY
(finally)
Who's that?

CARETAKER
Diego. He was the First. They used to say that there's only two kinds of people in the Old West. The Quick and the Dead. But Diego's <u>both</u>.

We see the old cowboy BURST INTO FLAMES before galloping off into the night. And it's then that we recognize him as the Old West Ghost Rider from our opening prologue.

JOHNNY
Where is he going?

CARETAKER
Nowhere.

They watch as the old Ghost Rider dissipates into the night. A sad and lonely figure. Haunted. Powerless.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
He finished his watch years ago. But he won't move on...

JOHNNY
Why not?

CARETAKER
The Spirit of Vengeance is a powerful entity. It's easy to lose yourself in it. When Diego's time was up he had nowhere to go, and nobody waiting for him in this world or any other. All he had left, all he knew, was vengeance.
(beat)
So he just keeps riding. Waiting to be called again. Hoping for one last mission that never comes...

Caretaker spits.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
All things must come to an end. The trick is in having a place to go when they do...

Caretaker claps him on the shoulder and turns away as Johnny watches Diego riding back and forth across the dark desert landscape -- burning and dissipating over and over...

EXT. HAVEN HOMES - SUNSET

Where Clara and Roxanne sit out in the courtyard...

ROXANNE
It's good to see you, Clara.

CLARA
It's good to see you, too, dear.
(patting her hand)
But why don't you stop cocking around and tell me why you're here?

Roxanne smiles. Shakes her head.

ROXANNE
You really do have some kind of gift, don't you, Clara? I mean, we always thought you were...

CLARA
A phony?

Roxanne nods.

CLARA (cont'd)
I was. But then one day everything changed. And I had real foresight. Do you know what day that was? The day when everything changed for me?

ROXANNE
(quietly)
The day you read Johnny's fortune.

Clara nods as she fishes a flask from her robe.

CLARA
You kids awakened the gift in me. There's something powerful between the two of you. Isn't there?

Roxanne nods.

CLARA (cont'd)
You could have moved on by now. You could have married someone else and started a family. But you didn't.

ROXANNE
(quietly)
It just didn't feel right...

Clara nods and sips from her flask.

ROXANNE (cont'd)
What does it mean, Clara?

CLARA
I think some souls are destined to be together. That two people can relive the same love over and over again...

ROXANNE
Why?

CLARA
Maybe it's because the love is so strong that it can't be broken. Or maybe it's for their own protection.

ROXANNE
You think Johnny's here to protect me?

Clara takes another sip as she gives her a look.

CLARA
Maybe you're here to protect *him*.

And now it's Roxanne who sips from the flask.

ROXANNE (cont'd)
What did you see that day? That day when you read Johnny's fortune?

CLARA
I saw Johnny make a deal...

ROXANNE
What kind of deal?

Clara takes the flask. Her hands trembling.

CLARA
The worst kind, dear...

We CLOSE ON Roxanne's reaction...

CLARA (cont'd)
The worst kind.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRINITY BRIDGE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - A WANTED POSTER

It's Johnny's face. Johnny stares back at his mug shot. His life has come completely undone. He sits down beneath the bridge and blows in his hands to keep warm.

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

As Roxanne stands outside his door and rings the doorbell. Nothing. She tries the metal outer door. It's open. She slides it open and steps into the old service elevator.

WIDER

To reveal two UNDERCOVER COPS in a van across the street. One watches with binoculars while the other radios in:

UNDERCOVER #1
We have another visitor...

POLICE RADIO (V.O.)
Is it Blaze?

UNDERCOVER #1
Negative. A female.

POLICE RADIO (V.O.)
Keep your eyes on her.

UNDERCOVER #1
(grinning)
That's a big 10-4...

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

As Roxanne steps into the huge, shadowed warehouse space...

ROXANNE
Johnny?

We hear a SHUFFLING NOISE as she steps into the living room. Someone is in there...searching through Johnny's things...

ROXANNE (cont'd)
Johnny? Is that you?

Roxanne steps around the corner just as --

MACK

Steps up before her with a sandwich in his mouth!

ROXANNE (cont'd)
AHHH!

MACK
AAAHHHH!

Mack's sandwich hits the floor. He's holding a box of PISTONS under one arm and a SIX-PACK under the other.

MACK (cont'd)
WHOA! JEEZ!

Roxanne steadies herself as she catches her breath...

ROXANNE
I'm sorry...

MACK
You okay? Ya'll jumped up like a cat on fire...

ROXANNE
I'm fine...thanks...

MACK
I'm Mack.

ROXANNE
Roxanne.

MACK
Sorry if I scared you. I got some new pistons for the stunt bike and I was gonna wrench on it for a bit.

ROXANNE
I'm looking for Johnny.

MACK
Hey, you're that reporter, ain't ya?

ROXANNE
Have you heard from him?

MACK
Man, I've been seeing you all over the news lately, what with this Ghost Rider business and all?

ROXANNE
Do you know where I can find him?

MACK
You really saw it? No joke?

ROXANNE
Mack. I need to find Johnny.

DING. It's the sound of the elevator opening.

MACK
C'mon. That must be him now...
(calling out)
YO! J.B.! You got company!

Mack heads into the front room. Roxanne takes a DEEP BREATH, collecting herself, before walking around the corner to see --

MACK

staring back at her with a strange look on his face.

MACK
That wasn't him...

ROXANNE
Mack...?

And then a MIDNIGHT BLUE POISON starts seeping across his skin! Roxanne SCREAMS as Mack decomposes to reveal --

BLACKHEART

standing behind him! Roxanne steps back as he grins.

BLACKHEART
Such a beautiful girl. It's no wonder that you hold his heart...

Roxanne backs up into the corner. Trapped.

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
'Abash'd the devil stood, and felt how awful goodness is, and saw virtue in her shape how lovely...'

And with that Blackheart clutches Roxanne by the neck! A sinister smile splits his face as he kisses her good-bye.

BLACKHEART
(whispering)
How awful goodness is...

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

As -- *WHOOSH!* -- the GHOST RIDER suddenly explodes from out of the darkness! The Ghost Rider touches the waiting motorcycle as it EXPLODES into its Hellish analog!

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - NIGHT

As we CLOSE ON the unmarked van across the street...

POLICE RADIO (V.O.)
Jensen, do you copy, over?

...to see WATER LEAKING onto the street from the inside.

POLICE RADIO (V.O.)
Price, do you copy, over?

We RISE UP to reveal that the UNDERCOVER COPS are dead, *floating inside the van.* Their faces locked in horror within their own watery tomb! The police radio floats on the surface of the water as it FIZZLES and SHORTS...

POLICE RADIO (V.O.)
Jensen! Price! Do you copy!

The water POOLS TOGETHER over the surface of the street. And as CAMERA CIRCLES we reveal -- WALLOW -- smiling as he slips unseen into the darkened alleyway...

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

As something miraculous occurs -- Roxanne doesn't turn that poisonous blue color of Blackheart's other victims.

ON BLACKHEART

His eyes growing wide with wonder as he realizes...

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

Ghost Rider pulls up to discover ROXANNE'S CAR parked outside. And then he turns to the sound of her SCREAM.

ON GHOST RIDER

As our CAMERA CIRCLES around him to reveal -- JOHNNY -- in agony within the Ghost Rider's body. He SCREAMS as our 360 ENDS on the raging face of the Ghost Rider:

GHOST RIDER
ROXANNE!

The Ghost Rider spins his Hellcycle around and races straight for the building! But just before he SMASHES into the brick wall he pulls up and -- *RIDES UP THE WALL!*

INT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

As Gressil looks out of the top floor window to see --

THE GHOST RIDER

Driving up the wall right for him!

GRESSIL
THE RIDER IS COMING!

ON ROXANNE

As she breaks free from Blackheart's clutches.

ROXANNE
JOHNNY! HELP!

Blackheart backhands Roxanne, knocking her unconscious!

BLACKHEART
Take care of the Rider!

He throws Roxanne over his shoulder and hurries off as --

CRAAAAASH!

GLASS EXPLODES as the Hellcycle bursts through the window!

GHOST RIDER
ROXANNE!

The room appears empty until -- GRESSIL -- drops down from the ceiling and sinks his sharpened teeth into the Ghost Rider's neck! The Ghost Rider HOWLS as he PUNCHES his spiked fist into Gressil's face. But his fist sinks through the earthly visage with no effect. Ghost Rider grabs Gressil and THROWS him out the shattered window!

EXT. JOHNNY'S LOFT - SAME

The police arrive in time to see -- GRESSIL -- falling four stories before hitting the street with a *SPLAT!*

CAPT. DOLAN
JESUS CHRIST!

NEW ANGLE

But instead of a body they find a PILE OF DIRT on the street. They look to each other, dumbfounded, until their attention is quickly shifted to the sounds of --

THE GHOST RIDER

Exploding out of the window on his Hellcycle! He lands right in the middle of the street before their wide eyes!

CAPT. DOLAN
Oh...my...God...

The police face off against the Ghost Rider as we see...

THE PILE OF DIRT

Starting to move. TWO EYES blink back from within the mound of earth before it swirls down the alleyway like some kind of sand serpent, escaping into the night...

ON GHOST RIDER

A raging wall of white-hot flame.

CAPT. DOLAN
OPEN FIRE!

The police unload on the Ghost Rider!

THE GHOST RIDER

REVS his flaming Hellcycle and races right for the road block of SQUAD CARS as the police jump out of the way:

POLICEMAN #2
MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!

SHHZZZZT!

The Hellcycle cuts through the road block bisecting the middle patrol car as it spins IN TWO BURNING HALVES!

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Where we see Officer Mackie tailing the Ghost Rider around the corner and down into a maze of alleyways.

OFFICER MACKIE
Suspect is heading north on Third...

POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)
That's a dead end. You got him.

OFFICER MACKIE
10-4 on that.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

As Officer Mackie chases the Ghost Rider into the dead end. But at the last second Ghost Rider pulls into a wheelie --

AND DRIVES UP THE SKYSCRAPER.

Officer Mackie gets out and watches in wonder as the Ghost Rider rides up the 75-STORY BANK OF AMERICA BUILDING!

OFFICER MACKIE
Suspect has fled north on Third...

POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)
Negative. That is a dead end. What is the suspect's 10-20?

OFFICER MACKIE
Up...
(beat)
The suspect is going up.

The landmark skyscraper is outlined in EMERALD ARGON at night, illuminating the Ghost Rider in a ghastly green glow.

ESTABLISHING

As the Ghost Rider reaches the top of the Bank of America. He speeds over to the other end of the building just as...

A POLICE CHOPPER

rises up over the roof. The CHOPPER'S SEARCHLIGHT blankets the Ghost Rider in a blinding white light.

POLICE CHOPPER P.A.
GET OFF THE MOTORCYCLE WITH YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEAD!

Ghost Rider REVS his Hellcycle as the Chopper gets closer...

POLICE CHOPPER P.A.
I REPEAT! GET OFF THE MOTORCYCLE--

VROOOOM!

The Ghost Rider GUNS his Hellcycle and JUMPS for the chopper! Before the horrified pilot can react Ghost Rider LEAPS from his Hellcycle and <u>into</u> the cockpit! He pulls the pilot close:

GHOST RIDER
STOP FOLLOWING ME.

The Pilot nods vigorously as the Ghost Rider jumps back out!

THE GHOST RIDER

plummets TEN STORIES down to the roof of the Chase Tower where his faithful Hellcycle awaits. The Hellcycle lurches one way -- then another -- before finally <u>catching</u> him with a ***WHUMMPPP***! The building SHUDDERS from the impact.

GHOST RIDER
ROXANNE!

ON THE STREET

As Capt. Dolan sees the helicopter flying away.

CAPT. DOLAN
Where the hell is my *chopper* going?

OFFICER MACKIE
He's coming down the other side, sir!

HELLCYCLE POV

As it HURTLES down the face of the Chase Building!

But just before we reach the street the Hellcycle pulls back and hits the surface of the street like a bomb.

KABOOM!

The force of impact sends SEWER LIDS exploding into the air. The Ghost Rider charges around the back alley to see...

THE POLICE.

And this time they're ready. TEAR GAS CANNISTERS are fired as the Ghost Rider HISSES and SPUTTERS in the noxious cloud.

CAPT. DOLAN
WE GOT HIM!

But as the SMOKE CLEARS we reveal that the Ghost Rider is no longer riding through the tear gas of the alleyway...

He's riding on the walls above it!

HUNDREDS OF ROUNDS are fired at the flaming spectre, raining chunks of brick and glass down from the office building.

ESTABLISHING

As the Ghost Rider continues WALL-JUMPING his way around the massive police force until he's past the blockades!

EXT. DOWNTOWN DALLAS - NIGHT

Where we see Ghost Rider racing towards the Trinity Bridge.

POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)
All units! All units! Code 3, high speed pursuit of motorcyclist heading West to the Trinity River...

EXT. TRINITY BRIDGE - NIGHT

Where we find S.W.A.T. TEAMS in front of the roadblock. The Ghost Rider slows to a stop. He *cannot* get through without killing someone. But the police are coming up behind him...

THE GHOST RIDER

Finally CRACKS the throttle and races for the road block. But at the last moment he VEERS his cycle into the river!

SPLASSSH!

The stunned policemen look down into the river to see a DIM YELLOW LIGHT fading beneath the roiling surface...

CAPT. DOLAN
Let's get some nets over --!

But before they can even *discuss* dragging the Trinity--

THE GHOST RIDER

<u>erupts</u> out of the muddy water! The Hellcycle rises onto the surface and races down river like a hydrofoil from Hell! They watch as the Ghost Rider escapes, leaving a trail of blue after-flame over the surface of the river!

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

SHADOWS MOVE through the cemetery as we reveal Caretaker looking over the headstones of his lost wife and daughter.

A MOUND OF EARTH

Suddenly appears behind him. It slowly circles him, like a shark. But he doesn't budge. He knows his time has come.

CARETAKER
Ya'll gonna show yourselves? Or are ya gonna stay in hiding like the spineless cowards that you are?

The CAMERA CIRCLES to reveal Gressil and Wallow...

GRESSIL
It's all over, old man...

CARETAKER
I've heard that before...

WALLOW
We have the Soul Crystal...

Caretaker stops at that. He knows what it means.

WALLOW
The New Hell will be born tonight in the heart of San Venganza...

GRESSIL
Pity you won't be alive to see it.

CARETAKER
Well, one thing's for sure...

CLAAANNG!

Caretaker *slams* the shovel against Wallow's face as WATER SPRAYS across the ancient tombstones!

CARETAKER
I'm going down fightin'.

ESTABLISHING

as Caretaker turns to see that Gressil is gone. And then he stops as he realizes -- *that he can't move his feet.*

NEW ANGLE

As Caretaker looks down to see TWO CLAWS reaching out from the earth itself and latching onto his ankles!

ON WALLOW

Glowering as he REGENERATES his liquid features...

WALLOW
You won't live to regret that...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

As Johnny urgently rides up to the Caretaker's shack.

JOHNNY
Caretaker?

There's no answer. Johnny searches the back.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Caretaker?

And then we hear a voice from the darkness...

CARETAKER
Johnny...

Johnny turns and runs through the graveyard to find--

CARETAKER.

Blackheart and his boys have done a number on the old man. The only saving grace is that he's here near his family...

JOHNNY
Caretaker...

Johnny kneels down and tries to stop the bleeding.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I'm so sorry...

CARETAKER
Don't be sorry. It's my time. I got somewhere to go in the end.

JOHNNY
They've got Roxanne...

CARETAKER
I know. I'm sorry as Hell, kid.

JOHNNY
Do you know where they are?

CARETAKER
(nodding)
A place called San Venganza. It's a forgotten Ghost Town about two hundred miles from here...

JOHNNY
Can you take me there?

CARETAKER
No. But I know the guy who can...

ESTABLISHING

As Johnny looks off to see -- DIEGO -- the Old West Ghost Rider, sitting astride his hellish steed in the distance.

CARETAKER
He can lead you as far as the cross-roads. Then you're on your own...

Caretaker GASPS as he takes his last breaths...

CARETAKER (cont'd)
You're not like the others. You didn't sell your soul for money or power. You did it out of love. It's something they don't understand. That makes you <u>unpredictable</u>. And that's the best thing you can be now...

We hear THUNDER RUMBLING in the distance...

CARETAKER
Sounds like a blue norther comin'...

Johnny smiles sadly as they clasp hands.

CARETAKER (cont'd)
Now bring the storm, kid...

And then Caretaker closes his eyes. And moves on.

SMASH CUT TO:

THE SHADOWY COWBOY

Waiting for Johnny up on the hill...

JOHNNY
You know San Venganza?

The Cowboy nods. Johnny straddles his motorcycle.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Can you keep up?

WHOOSH!

Cowboy and horse both BURST INTO FLAMES! The grinning skull of the Old West Ghost Rider smiles back. *'Just try me.'*

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

As Johnny rides side by side with his Western Doppelganger! They are a sight to behold -- racing across the desert landscape in two parallel streaks of after-flame!

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY'S SPEEDOMETER

Creeping past 100...125...150...the needle snaps as the Motorcycle EXPLODES into its HELLISH ANALOG! We hear a SECOND EXPLOSION as our CAMERA TILTS UP to reveal--

THE GRINNING SKULL

of the Ghost Rider! The skeleton horse burns bright blue with flame as it kicks into high gear to keep pace!

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

As they reach a forgotten CROSSROADS. The skeleton horse WHINNIES as the Western Ghost Rider pulls back. He's reached the end of his territory. He points his bony finger ahead.

JOHNNY
Thank you.

The Old West Ghost Rider tips his hat and turns back. And as he does we see his FIRE DIE OUT. The SHADOW LIFTS as he turns back to reveal the face of a handsome Spanish Vaquero.

DIEGO.

He nods, smiling, finally finding *his* ending. And then he rides off into the night before disappearing forever...

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - NIGHT

ON ROXANNE

As she awakes beneath the ghost town of San Venganza. She GASPS as she turns to see the CRYSTAL SKULL smiling at her.

BLACKHEART (O.S.)
You're awake...

WIDER - to reveal Blackheart stepping up behind her...

BLACKHEART
Then we can begin.

We CLOSE ON Roxanne's reaction as we...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

As the Ghost Rider continues through the desert night. In the distance is the pale light of a country gas station...

A MOUND OF EARTH

Suddenly runs along the ground beside him; like some giant gopher burrowing at the speed of the Hellcycle. Ghost Rider looks down to the earth beside him to see the face of --

GRESSIL

Smiling up at us! Gressil CROSS-CUTS the Ghost Rider, nearly knocking him off balance before...

GHOST RIDER

points his spiked fist and BLASTS HELLFIRE at the underground dweller! But the creature is way too fast and crafty as --

SCREEEEEECH!

Gressil latches onto the Hellcycle and TOPPLES the Ghost Rider, sending him and his Hellcycle CRASHING to the desert!

THE GHOST RIDER

SLIDES along fifty yards of desert, leaving FLAMING CACTI in his wake before SLAMMING into the gas pumps of the station!

A GANGLY SERVICE ATTENDANT steps outside with a comic book rolled up in his back pocket. He stares dumbly before:

SERVICE ATTENDANT
Ya'll okay, mister?

Gasoline is dripping over the flaming Ghost Rider as...

GHOST RIDER
RUN.

The Service Attendant looks down to the gasoline at his feet before running like a bat out of hell away from the station.

KA-BOOM!

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION obliterates the Ghost Rider! A Wall of flames reaches 200 feet in the sky. It's an INFERNAL BLAZE which no man could survive. But the Ghost Rider is no man.

The FLAMES PART LIKE THE RED SEA as the Ghost Rider steps into the SANDY DESERT beside the station where we see --

GRESSIL

Eagerly awaiting him; his teeth CHATTERING excitedly.

GHOST RIDER

Suddenly raises his fists in the air, drawing ALL OF THE FIRE from the explosion INTO HIS BODY and extinguishing the blaze. And then he JAMS HIS FISTS INTO THE GROUND and unleashes a MASSIVE HEAT BLAST into the sandy desert!

ON GRESSIL

Looking confused as he realizes -- he can't move! He looks down to see...the sand is becoming CRYSTALLIZED from the heat. The intense Hellfire is turning the sand into glass!

Gressil tries to scream but the fire works right up into his body, turning him into a GLASS SCULPTURE. He stands, frozen in terror, like a prehistoric insect trapped in amber as...

THE GHOST RIDER

Levels a MASSIVE SPIKED-FIST PUNCH right through the glass, SHATTERING Gressil into a thousand separate shards!

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - SAME

As Blackheart holds the crystal skull before Roxanne...

BLACKHEART
Do you know what this is?

Roxanne backs up as she shakes her head.

BLACKHEART
It's the Soul Crystal of Lubaatun.

He steps closer as she looks into its eyes to see the ominous BLACK MIST swirling within its crystal chambers.

BLACKHEART
Over five hundred years ago an army of Spanish Conquistadors came into the village of Lubaatun. They had been at war with the Aztecs for over a year. But on this day they came bearing a treaty from Cortez himself.

Roxanne trips and falls as Blackheart looms...

BLACKHEART
To celebrate their newfound peace the Aztecs put on a party for their new friends inside a Mayan temple. The elders offered up this sacred crystal skull as an offering of friendship...

Roxanne slowly backs up against the wall as Blackheart steps closer...the wall torches casting eerie shadows over Blackheart's sinister smile...

BLACKHEART
And then, right in the middle of their feast, the Conquistadors barricaded the doors. And proceeded to slaughter every man, woman, and child of the Aztec tribe...

Blackheart smiles.

BLACKHEART
I admire their cunning. In fact, in most ways you people are our better. You have something that we lack. Imagination. You seem to take delight in inventing new ways to torture each other...

ROXANNE
What do you want from me?

BLACKHEART
After the massacre there was a great earthquake. And before the murderers could flee the temple came down upon them. Their souls were trapped in this.

CLOSE ON - SOUL CRYSTAL

Within the roiling black mist we can now make out the HAUNTED FACES of the damned wraiths inside...

BLACKHEART
To keep it out of evil hands the Mayan spirits put a binding spell on the crystal. So that only a Pure Soul can open it. You are a Pure Soul, Roxanne.

We CLOSE ON Roxanne's reaction as we go...

BACK TO:

EXT. VENGANZA RIVER - NIGHT

The cold river shimmers just outside the walls of the old Ghost Town. Johnny steps past the banks of the water as --

WALLOW -- BURSTS OUT of the river behind him and drags him down into the depths of the inky black river!

UNDER THE WATER

As Johnny's lungs fill with the freezing water...

CLOSE ON - WALLOW

Feeling Johnny's life SEEPING AWAY in its watery clutches...

CLOSE ON - JOHNNY

His eyes suddenly BURNING YELLOW under the water as...

THWOOM!

Johnny transforms underwater! His Hellfire *charges* the water like a SONIC BLAST! Wallow SHRIEKS as Ghost Rider's fury turns the river into a BOILING CAULDRON! The demon's TRANSPARENT ECTOPLASM begins to blister and curdle until it IMPLODES within its own watery tomb!

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - NIGHT

THE SOUL CRYSTAL

Begins to shimmer from within. As if sensing that the key to their release is near. Roxanne looks away.

BLACKHEART
Don't fight it, Roxanne...

Roxanne cries out before she finally opens her eyes, locking her into the deathly gaze of the Soul Crystal!

EXT. SAN VENGANZA - NIGHT

As Johnny stumbles out of the river before turning to his faithful Hellcycle. He looks across the desert to see --

THE SUN

getting ready to rise. Soon his power will be gone. He unholsters Caretaker's HELLFIRE SHOTGUN off the back...

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - ROXANNE

Deep in the trance of the soul crystal. And within the chambers of the grinning skull we see the wraiths begin to slowly leak out...drawn to the purity of her gaze...

BLACKHEART

throws Roxanne against the wall. The stream of black wraiths cannot stop itself and they swarm into his eyes!

NEW ANGLE

As Blackheart's skin turns into that DEEP MIDNIGHT BLUE. But unlike his victims, Blackheart is feeding off the poison as his muscle and sinew begins to grow...

EXT. SAN VENGANZA - NIGHT

Where Johnny steps through the dusty streets of this forgotten ghost town. Throughout our story we've moved closer and closer to that of a Classic Western.

And now we're there.

A TUMBLEWEED blows past as we TRACK Johnny's jingling motorcycle boots down what was once Main Street.

JOHNNY
BLACKHEART!

He wraps his chains over his fist as he goes...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I'M HERE! LET HER GO!

Silence. And then from out of the shadows steps --

BLACKHEART

One of the most intimidating villains in the history of Marvel Comics. As he speaks now we hear the sound of his voice fluctuate in the timbre of a thousand souls...

BLACKHEART
You're just in time, Cowboy...

WHOOSH!

Johnny erupts into the raging fury of the Ghost Rider!

GHOST RIDER
ROXANNE.

BLACKHEART
I was going to kill here, Rider. And then she turned out to be the key. No wonder you're drawn to her. You were destined to be together. But don't worry. I promise to take care of your girl...in the New Hell.

Ghost Rider SNAPS his Hellchain. But Blackheart grabs the flaming links in one hand and JERKS the Ghost Rider off his feet and into the ruins of the old prison walls!

CRAAASH!

Dust billows as the Ghost Rider struggles to his feet. He motions his spiked fist in the air as --

VROOOOM!

The Hellcycle suddenly accelerates into the street and CUTS THROUGH the mighty Blackheart as napalam-like blue gore slides up and over the windshield! But then...

BLACKHEART

begins to pull himself back together. His necroplasm reforming until his sinewy body is complete once again!

INT. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS - NIGHT

As Roxanne raises her weary head...

ROXANNE
Johnny...

EXT. SAN VENGANZA - NIGHT

As Blackheart picks up Ghost Rider and SLAMS him against the old bank structure! Ghost Rider is no match for him. His hellfire begins to flicker as the **sun rises...**

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
Mephistopheles himself is afraid of me now. I can feel him watching us. Hoping that you can pull off some miracle to save his obsolete Hell.

ON ROXANNE

As she steps out of the underground cavern and picks up Johnny's Hellfire Shotgun off the ground...

ON BLACKHEART

As he stands victoriously over the fallen Rider as...

ROXANNE
JOHNNY!

Johnny turns as Roxanne throws him the shotgun! Johnny catches it in one hand as Blackheart starts to laugh:

BLACKHEART
Do you really think that bullets can stop me now, Blaze?

Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY
No...

And then he smiles.

JOHNNY
But hellfire might.

THWOOOM!

Blackheart SHRIEKS as the burst of hellfire scorches his face! He's knocked back as Johnny steps towards him, rapid-firing shot after shot like THE RIFLEMAN!

THWOOM! THWOOM! THWOOM!

Blackheart is knocked back through the streets, until Johnny raises the shotgun for one killing blast --

CLICK.

Johnny stops. He's out. Blackheart opens his burned eyes. But before Johnny can refill the barrels he's viciously KNOCKED BACK against the old HANGING TREE!

BLACKHEART (cont'd)
You no longer possess the Spirit of Vengeance. You have nothing...

JOHNNY
(breathless)
You're wrong...

And as Johnny leans back under the shade of the ominous tree we notice the sun is shaded off his face...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I have faith.

Blackheart stops. Unsure.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Something you'll never know.

BLACKHEART
And I have the power of a thousand souls! The souls of the damned!

Johnny suddenly GRABS Blackheart and pushes him out of the sunlight and up against the old tree as -- *WHOOSH!* He transforms back into the Ghost Rider once again!

GHOST RIDER
LOOK INTO MY EYES.

BLACKHEART
NO!

Blackheart gives an ungodly shrieks as we see...

THE PENANCE STARE

And the HORRIFIC IMAGES of the SINS OF A THOUSAND MEN!

BLACKHEART
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME!

GHOST RIDER
FEEL MY PENANCE STARE...

As the BLUE HELLFIRE grows inside his eyes...

GHOST RIDER
ONE THOUSAND TIMES.

We're sucked into the wormhole of the Penance stare as rapid-fire images are vomited back at us -- but this time with BLACKHEART as the sole victim of their crimes!

ON BLACKHEART

as his body begins to atrophy, his coloring gone, until he is nothing but a boy again, curled up in a shivering ball of pain. Forever a prisoner of his own mine. His own <u>soul</u>.

ROXANNE
Johnny...?

The Ghost Rider turns to see Roxanne stepping over...

GHOST RIDER
ROXANNE...

She steps closer. But he turns away into the shadows.

ROXANNE
Look at me...

GHOST RIDER
NO.

ROXANNE
Please...

GHOST RIDER
MONSTER...

ROXANNE
No...

Roxanne reaches out for him. As she does the *flames part.* She touches, not bone, but Johnny's gentle face within the heat haze. She leans in as Johnny pulls back.

ROXANNE (cont'd)
I'm not afraid...

She kisses him as the halo of flame engulfs them both. And as she pulls back we see -- Johnny Blaze is <u>back</u>.

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

strikes the center of the dusty square as...

MEPHISTOPHELES (V.O.)
ENOUGH!

MEPHISTOPHELES

steps out of the smoke, holding that Silver Skull cane in his hand. He looks down at the quivering boy before him...

MEPHISTOPHELES
What have you done...

Mephistopheles steps closer as he sees the boy staring off into space. His mind an eternal prison.

MEPHISTOPHELES
...to my <u>son</u>?

Johnny stops at that. Mephistopheles turns.

MEPHISTOPHELES
I told you I wanted him <u>alive</u>.

At this Johnny gives a hard smile.

JOHNNY
He is alive. I'm good to my word.
(beat)
Just like you.

Mephistopheles THUMPS his cane in anger. Johnny has beaten him at his own game. There's nothing he can do.

MEPHISTOPHELES
Very well. The Spirit of Vengeance shall return to me. And I will find another host. One who has their heart in a dark place. One who will use it to serve me. And make my Hell stronger than ever.

The Silver Skull sits waiting for the wraith, to hold it once again. Johnny looks to Roxanne. Back to Mephistopheles.

MEPHISTOPHELES (cont'd)
What are you waiting for?

JOHNNY
I've seen what you're doing to this world. I know now that there's a war going on between good and evil. And I know what side I'm on.

Mephistopheles trembles with rage...

JOHNNY (cont'd)
I'm going to take what you've given me. Take this curse. And I'm going to use it <u>against</u> you.

MEPHISTOPHELES
You wouldn't dare...

Johnny grins.

JOHNNY
Watch me.

The ground itself SHAKES from the Devil's anger!

MEPHISTOPHELES
I'll see you again, Johnny Blaze.

JOHNNY
I'll be waiting...

A BURST OF BLUE FLAME dissipates to reveal -- that both Mephistopheles and Blackheart are <u>gone</u>. For now.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

The desert is bathed in the bloody glow of a newborn sun as Roxanne and Johnny hold each other for the last time...

JOHNNY
Seems every time I see you I'm apologizing for something...

ROXANNE
(sad smile)
It sure does seem that way...

JOHNNY
I started out doing this for us. So that we could be together.

ROXANNE
I know...

JOHNNY
But there's people out there that need help...help I can give 'em...

He touches her cheek.

JOHNNY (cont'd)
Do you know how much I love you?

She smiles as the tears begin to come...

ROXANNE
Why don't you remind me?
(voice cracking)
Just one more time?

Johnny smiles through tears of his own now.

JOHNNY
Always and forever...

They kiss as we SLOWLY PULL BACK from the two lovers...

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

As Johnny rides across the barren desert...

ROXANNE (V.O.)
For weeks now the Southwest has been alive with the tall tales of the Ghost Rider -- a wraith of the road that protects the innocent and punishes the wicked...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

As we see Johnny kneel before his father's grave. He smiles. Saying a silent good-bye. And then he turns to see the grave of Caretaker, buried beside his wife and daughter at last.

ROXANNE (V.O.)
For most the Ghost Rider remains a hoax, a Texas-sized urban legend.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

As Johnny blows right through the Crossroads on his way to somewhere else. The whole world opening up before him...

ROXANNE (V.O.)
But for others, the Ghost Rider has come to represent something more...

EXT. STREET - DAY

As we see Roxanne reporting from a different looking Dallas. One with people and families out on the streets again...

ROXANNE (V.O.)
A hero.

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

MUSIC UP: GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY

As Johnny ventures into the great wide open. And then we see a FLASH OF FIRE in the distance as we...

FADE OUT.

THE END